STUDY OF STUDENTS' INTENTION TO LEAVE COLLEGE DURING THEIR FRESHMAN YEAR

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my son, Elias Kyle Van Duser. I hope this degree allows me to provide the best life for you and inspires you to pursue your dreams.

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Abstract

The issue of first year student retention has major financial ramifications for institutions of higher education, state and federal governments, and most importantly, the students who decide to depart. This research inquiry used a collective case study to answer the following question: Why do first-time degree seeking students at a large public research university indicate they plan to leave (stop-out or dropout) prior to the start of classes? This study employed John Bean's (2005) Nine Themes of College Student Retention as a theoretical construct to understand the problem.

Ten resident students and eleven nonresident students from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa participated in the study. Results demonstrated that finances was the overarching theme affecting students' intentions and decision-making for both residents and nonresidents. Implications for practice demonstrate that the rising cost of tuition nationwide are influencing students' enrollment intentions and decisions. Furthermore, institutions of higher learning and stakeholders, such as state governments and boards of regents, should consider finding alternate means for funding colleges and universities beyond raising tuition.

Chapter One: Introduction

The Problem

Claiborne Pell once said that the strength of the United States is not the gold at Fort Knox or the weapons of mass destruction that we have, but the sum of the education and the character of our people (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The true value of having a higher education degree may never fully be known. However, retention and graduation rates are ongoing problems within institutions of higher education. Only 55% of first-time degree seeking students complete a baccalaureate degree within six years (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). Unfortunately, this is just the national average, and some states have much lower percentages. Institutions of higher education lose most students in the transition from the first to the second year. Approximately 23% of first-time freshmen dropout of college within the first year (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). This is an alarming trend considering the benefits that having a degree yields for an individual and for society (Zumeta, Breneman, Callan, & Finney, 2012).

Why should first-year retention and graduation rates be studied? There are many reasons. As an old adage says, money makes the world go round. State and federal governments spend billions of dollars on higher education (Zumeta, et al., 2012). This is a large amount of money considering the conflicting social interests require precious tax dollars (i.e., healthcare, social security, prisons, primary and secondary education). However, for each dollar the government invests in higher education, it sees roughly five dollars in return generated through tax revenue (Baum & Payea, 2004). Furthermore, those who have a college degree will make 73% more money during the course of their lifetimes than those who do not (Baum & Payea, 2004). This figure translates to over a million dollars in lifetime earnings (Zumeta et al., 2012). In addition to this positive financial impact on state and federal governments, obtaining a degree serves many

other benefits. Those who receive a degree are more likely to vote, donate blood, and participate in organized volunteer work (Zumeta et al., 2012). They are also more likely to be in good health, less likely to smoke, and less likely to be incarcerated (Baum & Payea, 2004). A student's decision to depart has major financial consequences for the individual, state and federal governments, and society.

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to build on the existing body of literature on student retention. Metaphorically, the research served as one more brick to add to this wall of knowledge. The focus of this study is on student intentionality and its impact on student departure. Social science researchers Ajzen and Fishben (1980) argued that intentionality is the primary predictor of behavior, but despite their findings, there is little research in the field of retention about the role intentionality plays in a student's decision to dropout or its impact. More specifically, no research has attempted to explain why students would enter a degree-granting institution without the intention of completing a degree. Although Bean (2005) highlighted this theme as a common indicator for student departure, he stated that student intentionality is ultimately an empty variable because little is known about why students intend to leave. This study utilized qualitative data from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa to fill this gap in the literature.

There is an exhaustive body of literature that examines the issue of first-year student retention. Comprehensive data sets on student retention can be found through the National Center for Education Statistics and the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. Additionally, there are well-researched and peer-reviewed theoretical models explaining the process of first-year student departure, such as Vincent Tinto's (1993) theory on student departure and Alexander Astin's (1999) student involvement theory.

Why then, is there a need to conduct yet another study on first-year student departure? Part of the purpose and justification for this study stems from how student retention and graduation rates are calculated from a national standpoint. For reporting purposes, retention and graduation rates are calculated by including all incoming first-year, including students who come straight from finishing their General Education Diploma (GED) or high school diploma into college students (National Center For Educational Statistics, 2014). Community college administrators opposed this "industry standard" of reporting because it does not always align with students' objectives for entering higher education (Bailey, Calcagono, Jenkins, Leinbach, & Kienzl, 2005). For example, a student may enter college with the objective of obtaining a certain skill set or for the sole purpose of obtaining a vocational certificate. Such students may complete their educational objectives with the institution, but they are still viewed as a loss when retention and graduation rates are calculated. Based on the industry standard calculation, the national average first-year retention rates for community college students is 57% (NCES, 2014). In 2005, The Community College Research Center found that 40% of first-time community college students' indicated that their primary reason for enrolling was for professional enrichment or to develop job skills (Bailey et al., 2005). The remaining 60% of students sought to earn an associate's degree, transfer to a four-year college, or both (Bailey et al., 2005). Because of this, community college administrators contest the negative feedback received from various stakeholders (e.g., state leadership, taxpayers, community leaders) as a result of their low retention rates (Bailey et al., 2005).

In March 2014, the University of Hawai‘i (UH) System required that all incoming first-year students at all UH institutions report their educational objectives prior to enrolling in classes (Nishida, 2015). The UH System implemented the educational objectives statement to track

students for financial reporting of federal funds received. The questions addressing students' educational objectives are stated in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1

Educational Objectives: Freshman Non-HI Residents

Immediate educational goal at my home campus is	Number	Percent
Earn a certificate	12	2.7
Earn an associate's degree (2-year)	0	0.0
Earn a bachelor`s degree (4-year)	398	89.8
Take courses to transfer to another college	20	4.5
Take courses, but not towards a degree	1	0.2
Not sure (I am not sure any of the above statements apply to me)	12	2.7
Total	443	100.0

Data provided through STAR Academic Logic. Table includes data for incoming freshman cohort at UHM. Numbers refers to nonresident respondents. Percent refers to percentage of all nonresident respondents.

Table 2

Educational Objectives: Freshman HI Residents

Immediate educational goal at my home campus is	Number	Percent
Earn a certificate	20	1.9
Earn an associate's degree (2-year)	0	0.0
Earn a bachelor`s degree (4-year)	940	89.8
Take courses to transfer to another college	40	3.8
Take courses, but not towards a degree	6	0.6
Not sure (I am not sure any of the above statements apply to me)	41	3.9
Total	1,047	100.0

Data provided through STAR Academic Logic. Table includes data for incoming freshman cohort at UHM. Numbers refers to resident respondents. Percent refers to percentage of all resident respondents.

According to 2014 data collected through Banner Software used throughout the UH System for maintaining students' data and records, approximately 4% (n=60) of students indicated that they planned to transfer to another college prior to the first day of classes at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (STAR Educational Objectives Report, 2014). This number warrants consideration given that 21% of freshmen at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa leave at the end of their first year (MIRO, 2014).

Additional studies on first-year student retention at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa supported the notion that students may come to the university without the intention of graduating. The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa conducted a "Leaver Study" in 2012. The survey sought to understand the primary reasons why students depart from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa after their first year. The study yielded some interesting findings that support the notion that students come to the university without the intention of graduating. One finding in

particular noted that "prior to even enrolling at Mānoa, 21 percent of leavers from Hawai'i already planned to transfer from Mānoa to another institution. Most eventually transfer to mainland institutions" (UHM Leaver Study, 2012, p. 2). Another finding noted, "The assumption is often made that students who leave the University are often very unhappy. Data from this study contradict that assumption. All groups of leavers except dropouts are quite satisfied with their overall educational experiences while at UHM" (p. 8). Again, the data generated from the UHM Leaver Study highlighted that many students initially enroll at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa without the intention of obtaining a degree.

One may ask the logical question, "why do intended leavers decide to attend UHM in the first place?" Jefferey Selingo (2013) in his book College Unbound: The Future of Higher Education and What it Means for Students, he argues that there is no one single factor that influences the selection process. Rather, Selingo (2013) stated, "for most kids and families, it's not going to be a rational process" (p. 122). College selections are made based on fit, which is not often clear for eighteen yearolds. The reasons can often vary from cost, to major, to even the ranking of the school's athletic program (Selingo, 2013).

An additional data source, the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey for the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (2013) supported similar findings regarding the notion of first-time students attending an institution of higher education without the purpose of obtaining a degree (MIRO, 2014). The CIRP Freshman Survey is administered to hundreds of thousands of students at various two- and four-year colleges nationwide prior to the start of classes every year and covers a wide range of student characteristics, including parental income and education, ethnicity, financial aid, secondary school achievement, values, beliefs, and educational goals. The purpose of the survey is for college administrators to gain insights

regarding the incoming class. Institutions participating in the CIRP Freshman Survey received statistical results that are categorized by gender and full-time versus part-time status and include comparisons with similar institutions participating in the report (MIRO, 2014). Two of the 47 questions are pertinent to the purpose of this research inquiry. Question 45 asks, "How many years do you expect it will take you to graduate from this college?" Potential responses include "1," "2," "3," "4," "5," "6+," and "do not plan to graduate from this college" (MIRO, 2014). Approximately 4.3% of respondents indicated they "do not plan to graduate from this college," whereas only 1.2 % of other public four-year college participants indicated the same response (MIRO, 2014). Question 47 states, "What is your best guess at the chances in which you will transfer prior to graduation," with options being "very good chance," "some chance," "little chance," and "no chance" (MIRO, 2014). Over 35% of participants at UHM indicated "some chance" or a "very good chance" of transferring to another college before graduating, compared to only 20% of participants at similar institutions. This was statistically significant with an alpha of .001 (MIRO, 2014).

The quantitative data above demonstrates that students may enroll in a higher education institution without the intention of graduating; however, there are no clear explanations. Furthermore, there is no current literature that addresses the problem of students attending a large research university with little to no intention of graduating. Comparatively, Tinto (1993) argued that student departure is a "longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the institution" (p. 94). The data provided does not necessarily disprove or deny Tinto's model. Rather, it highlights that a percentage of incoming first-year students do not align with the current model explaining student persistence. The

purpose of this study is to conduct a qualitative inquiry that examines why students attend a large public research university with no intention of completing a degree.

Research Question

The following research question guides this study:

Why do first-time degree seeking students at a large public research university indicate they plan to leave (stop-out or dropout) prior to the start of classes?

Definition of Terms

The terminology used in this study relates to higher education. However, it is helpful to define key terms frequently referenced throughout this inquiry.

Capital Investment

The term capital investment refers to the amount an individual or entity invests in something, in this case, education, in hopes of seeing future financial returns that exceed the initial investment (Damodaran, 2007).

Dropout

A student who decides to permanently depart from higher education and never returns.

Graduation

Indicates students' completion of their baccalaureate degrees. The average time to completion for a first-time degree-seeking student is six years (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014).

First-Year Student

A first-year student is an individual who graduates high school and proceeds directly to a four-year college (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014).

Retention

A student's ability to progress from one academic year to the next in good academic standing with the institution. At four-year universities, retention rates are calculated by the percentage of first-time bachelor's (or equivalent) degree-seeking undergraduates from the previous fall semester who are again enrolled in the current fall semester (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014).

Transfer and Transfer Out

The terms "transfer" and "transfer out" is used synonymously throughout the study. They refer to students who disenroll in the institution of origin and enroll at another college.

Traditional-Age College Student

A traditional-age college student refers to students between the ages of 18 and 22 who proced directly from high school to higher education.

Stop-Out

A student who leaves college and decides to return after an extended absence. The absence must be a minimum of one academic semester, but it may be much longer.

Tuition Revenue

The term tuition revenue refers to money generated for the institution through students' tuition and fees.

For this study, the issue of first-year student retention rates is framed in the context of four-year public institutions of higher education. This is due to the fact that retention varies significantly across types of post-secondary institutions, as does the financial impact (Stanley, 2012). All statistics and figures discussed apply most directly to four-year baccalaureate degree-granting institutions. There is also respective depth of information available on the issue of student departure for four-year institutions. Additionally, the financial implications vary

significantly between community colleges, four-year public institutions, for-profit colleges, and not-for-profit colleges (Zumeta et al., 2012). For example, private not-for-profit colleges tend to have high retention and graduation rates (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). Public two-year colleges are relatively inexpensive when compared to private and public four-year colleges and require less out-of-pocket costs for individual students. The primary source of funding to cover the operating budget of public two-year colleges comes from federal and state tax dollars. The cost-sharing breakdown at public four-year colleges is approximately 60% from the state and the remaining 40% via tuition dollars (Zumeta et al., 2012).

The Cost of Student Departure

There are many negative consequences that occur when a student decides to depart from college. However, the central focus of this section is on the financial repercussions of departure. The first financial implication addresses a student's loss in capital investment via tuition paid. The average cost for in-state tuition and fees at a public four-year college is $8,893 (College Board, 2015). When students decide to leave college, they do not recover the amount paid for tuition and fees. Although they may have learned applicable information for their next life endeavor, the initial investment does not yield a traditional measure of knowledge acquisition for employers such as a degree or a certificate.

Another financial impact is the result of students' foregone wages, or money they could have earned had they not been in school. This is an essential issue that students should consider when making the decision to depart from college. It is estimated that an individual with a baccalaureate degree will earn nearly one million dollars more than someone with some college experience, but no degree (Carnevale & Rose, 2012). This figure is broken down by median yearly income for men and for women (see Figure 1).

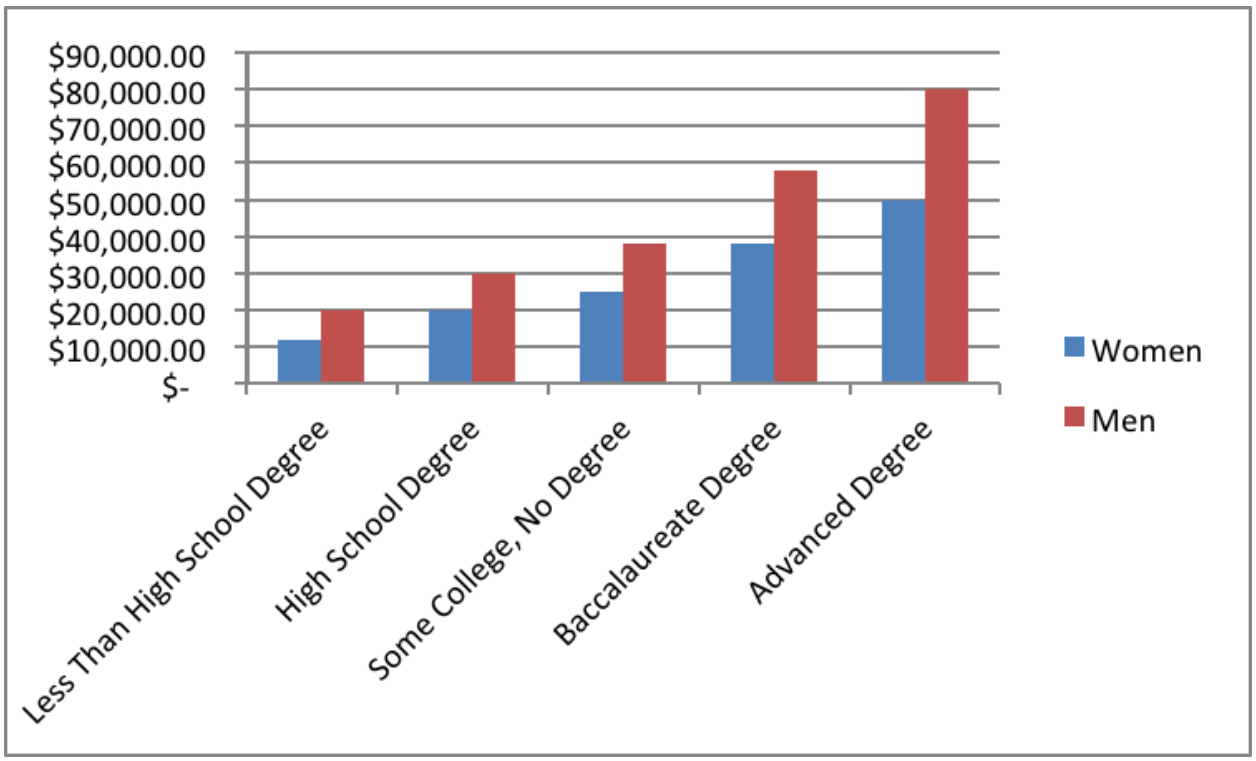


Figure 1. Average Annual Income by Educational Level. (Source: Zumeta, 2012).

Unfortunately, there is still a prevalent wage gap between men and women. This data has surfaced among policy makers and employers; however, not enough has been done to close the wage gap. In 2014, the U.S. Democratic Party put forth a pay equity bill on the Senate floor. The bill did receive more votes than proponents (53 vs. 44), but it did not reach enough votes to prevent a filibuster (Joachim, 2014). Despite the unfortunate existence of a wage gap between women and men, a college degree still yields significantly more earnings than a high school diploma for both genders.

Students' forgone wages not only affect the individual, but they also have a negative financial impact on the states. According to Zumeta (2012) and his colleagues, state governments covered approximately 60% of a student's cost to attend higher education. The national average each state pays for one student to attend college per year is $13,339 (National Center for

Educational Statistics, 2014). One of the reasons states pick up this cost is because, as noted above, they receive five dollars in return through tax revenue for every dollar invested in higher education (Zumeta et al., 2012). When students depart from higher education, the state loses both its capital investment and this potential return, as students with only some college but no degree earn less taxable income on average than those with a degree (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

States also experience a negative financial impact within the context of labor market trends. According to Zumeta et al. (2012), between 1999 and 2004, there was an 18% increase in jobs that require individuals to have a college degree. This totaled over 4.1 million new jobs in 11 years. Meanwhile, jobs that did not require a college degree, such as in manufacturing career fields, saw a 21% decrease during the same time. These figures are expected to continue, with a rise in jobs that require college degrees and a decrease in those that do not (Zumeta, et al., 2012). This will result in states needing to produce more college graduates to meet the labor market demands. Students' decision to stop out or dropout affects the ability to produce enough college graduates to meet labor market demands, thus leading to an overall loss in productivity for the state (Zumeta, et al. 2012). When employers do not have readily available access to skilled employees, they are forced to outsource jobs, which hurts local economies.

A student's decision to depart from college does have a measurable financial impact on society beyond the local economy. Most notably, unemployment rates are significantly lower for college graduates compared to those without a college degree. In 2013, the unemployment rate for those with a baccalaureate degree was 4% compared to 7% for those with some college but no degree (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). Additionally, those with a college degree are less likely to be incarcerated than those without. Approximately 1.2% of those with only a high school diploma are incarcerated, whereas only 0.1% of those with a college degree are. The cost

to fund one prisoner per year is approximately $26,000. Comparatively, public four-year colleges spend approximately $25,000 per year per student (Harlow, 2003). This is a depressing comparison considering a college degree inherently translates to greater opportunity for the individual, whereas prisons yield zero return on investment for the state and no opportunities for the individual. In fact, research has shown that the longer someone is incarcerated, the more difficult it is for them to adjust to life outside of prison (Pritikin, 2009). In summary, it costs taxpayers much more money to have an uneducated society over time than to invest in institutions of higher education.

Individual institutions absorb a major financial loss when students withdraw from college. The impact is felt through the loss of tuition revenue generated by the student. An example can be seen with the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM). The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa had a first-year student retention rate of 78.6% in 2010, which is almost equal to the national average. The remaining 21.4% translates to 388 freshmen from 2010 who dropped out, stopped out, or transferred during the first year enrolled (Mānoa Institutional Research Office, 2010). A conservative tuition revenue estimate at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa is calculated by a 70/30 breakdown between students paying resident tuition and students paying Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) tuition (Stanly, 2012). Western Undergraduate Exchange refers to the agreement between Hawai‘i and states in the western region of the continental United States. The agreement allows students from western states to attend the University of Hawai‘i and pay 150% of the cost of resident tuition as opposed to out-of-state students who pay 300% of the resident rate. The agreement is reciprocal, with Hawai‘i residents allowed to attend colleges within the WUE agreement and pay 150% the cost of resident tuition (UHM Catalog, 2010). The Mānoa Institutional Research Office (2010) utilized a 70/30 ratio as

it accurately reflects the ratio of resident to WUE students at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. I excluded nonresident tuition from the calculation because it fluctuates from year to year and the estimate is designed to be conservative. In 2010, the tuition was $7,584 for residents and $11,376 for WUE students (UHM Catalog, 2010). A 70/30 ratio of the students who departed in 2010 is equivalent to 271 resident and 116 WUE students. Basic arithmetic (271 x $7,584) + (116 x $11,376) demonstrates that the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa lost approximately $3,374,880 in tuition revenue for 2010 alone. Furthermore, this number is annually recurring.

The ability to retain students has the potential to serve as a primary form of cost savings for higher education administrators. Again, the UHM 2010 cohort can serve as an example of potential cost savings for colleges nationwide. If the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa had been able to retain 26 of the 388 students who dropped out, the institution would have saved over $259,920 (Stanley, 2012). It should be noted that the calculation for retention revenue is applicable to all universities within the United States. The ratio of nonresident and resident students may fluctuate from institution to institution. However, the loss of revenue from tuition dollars due to student departure is relatively high for institutions across the United States. Specifically, it is most costly for those institutions that have the lowest first-year retention rates (NCES, 2014).

Former United States President Barack Obama (2009) set a national goal for education reform: to have at least 60% of working-age adults ages 25–64 obtain a two- or four-year degree by the year 2020. The government set this national goal because there are predicted increases in jobs requiring a college degree (Georgetown University, 2010). Researchers at Georgetown University (2010) estimated a shortfall of 300,000 college graduates every year between 2008 and 2018. Georgetown University researchers stated that

> this shortage is the latest indication of how crucial postsecondary education and training has become to the American economy. . . Our calculations show that America's colleges and universities would need to increase the number of degrees they confer by 10 percent annually (p. 1).

In Hawai‘i alone, by 2020, 70% of all jobs will require some college education (Hawai‘i P-20, 2014). Labor market demands dictate that there is a clear need for college graduates both nationally and in the state of Hawai‘i. When approximately 23% of students dropout within their first year of college, institutions of higher education are not able to meet labor market demands. This creates a ripple effect that is felt by the federal government, the State, and society (Georgetown University, 2010). As such, there is a clear need to study the issue of first-year student retention in higher education.

Assumption and Limitation

There is one important assumption this research inquiry makes: students who indicated a desire to transfer prior to enrolling at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, as demonstrated through their educational objectives, CIRP Freshman Survey data, and UHM Leaver study data, were serious regarding this intention. This signals that students are knowledgeable of and accountable for their statements and actions. Students may change their mind after enrolling and engaging in their undergraduate experience. Therefore, the descriptive statistics shared above support the idea that many students enroll at a large public research university with no intention of obtaining a degree.

Positionality of the Researcher

I am in a unique position within the University of Hawai‘i System and the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. I serve as a current tenure-track faculty specialist at the University in the Office of the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Education. I also serve as the acting director of the university’s First-Year Programs. As such, I have extensive access to institutional data for the purpose of program improvement.

Overview of Literature Review and Theoretical Lens

There is an extensive body of literature on the topic of student retention. Chapter two reviews four key areas in the literature as they relate to first-year student departure. Areas reviewed include: opposition to studying student retention, current theoretical models explaining student departure, first-year programs designed to increase student retention, and the use of predictive modeling to guide student retention efforts and policy development. The introduction to chapter two provides an articulation of how and why the four subject areas were determined.

Although there is an extensive body of literature on the issue of student departure, there is still a gap in research explaining why students may come to a public four-year institution of higher education without the intention of graduating. As such, John Bean’s (2005) “Nine Themes of College Student Retention” was used as the theoretical model to help provide context for the problem. Bean’s (2005) nine themes provided a framework for understanding the problem of student retention. Furthermore, Bean’s (nine themes) helped with the analysis of the data and discussion of the findings.

Epistemological Lens

Epistemological paradigms guide the way in which individuals undertake research and acquire knowledge. I adopt a constructivist epistemological paradigm for the purpose of this

qualitative inquiry. A constructivist paradigm denies the existence of an objective truth. Instead, it asserts that truth and knowledge are relative, meaning they are socially and experientially constructed (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). A constructivist paradigm helped me understand the multitude of reasons and contexts that influence students' perception of higher education institutions, or, their intentionalities for indicating that graduation is not an objective for them.

Overview of Methodology

The chosen methodology in this research inquiry is case study. Case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system; specifically, setting, time, and context are tied to the research problem (Creswell, 2007). A case study requires the use of multiple data sources, such as interviews, observations, surveys, and documents to report a case description and identified themes. Case studies may use multiple participants, also known as collective case study, so long as they all are bound to the same system (Creswell, 2007). I used a collective case study to explore the issue of students enroll at a large public research university without the intention of graduating. Data sources included semi-structured interviews, participants' grade point average (GPA), and their decision to re-enroll at the original institution at the end of their first year.

Overview of Complete Document

The following chapters further explore first-year student retention rates at a large public research university. Chapter two provides a thorough literature review of the issue on first year student retention at public four year universities in the United States. Chapter three includes an in-depth overview of the methodology selected for this research inquiry and the reason why case study was selected. It also includes interview questions and reviews the forms of data collection and their alignment with the research questions guiding this inquiry. Chapter four provides a

synthesis of all data collected and findings. Chapter five concludes the study and proposes implications for current student affairs practitioners, discusses the limitations of the findings, and suggests areas for further research. Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to conduct a qualitative inquiry that examines why students attend a large public research university with no intention of completing a degree.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion

Merriam (1998) argued that "besides providing a foundation—a theoretical framework—for the problem to be investigated, the literature review can demonstrate how the present study advances, refines, or revises what is already known" (p. 51) There is an extensive body of literature on the topic of first-year student retention (Astin, 1999; Drake, 2011; Gordon, Young, & Kalianov, 2001; Rheinheimer & McKenzie, 2011; Tinto, 1993). This chapter provides a synthesis of the first-year retention literature currently available, and it is broken down into four main subject areas. The first subject area is the evolving history of student retention. I apply a historical lens, tracing how the study of student retention developed into what it is today. The second subject area is the opposition to studying student retention. In any good argument, there is a need to recognize the counterpoints, so in this section I discuss current arguments against the need for studying student retention.

The third subject area includes the current peer-reviewed theoretical models used to explain the phenomenon of student departure. These models include Tinto's (1975, 1993) synthesis of student departure, Astin's (1985, 1999) involvement theory, Museus' (2008) culturally engaging campus environments model, and Harper and Quaye's (2007) venues for black identity expression and development model. I selected Tinto (1975, 1993) because his theory is arguably the most widely used theory among researchers in the field. According to Google Scholar, his original work has been cited more than any other scholar in the field of student retention. I include Astin (1985, 1999) because many of the programs designed to increase student retention draw from his involvement theory, which has provided a theoretical basis for funding co-curricular student retention programing. I also include Museus (2008) and Harper and Quaye (2007) because they addressed the institutional barriers minority students

face. Historically, students of color have had much lower retention rates compared to their white counterparts. Museus (2008) and Quaye and Harper (2007) offered peer-reviewed explanations for the systemic challenges minority students feel and face.

I also discuss current first-year programs designed to increase student retention. These existing programs use theory and evidence to improve student retention on college campuses. It is important to note that almost all of these first-year support programs draw from a theoretical model. This is because theory is designed to guide practice (McDade, 1999). There has been extensive research on and assessment of the first-year programs and their ability to improve student retention (Tinto, 2012).

The last section covers the role regression and predictive analysis play in limiting student departure. This section, which builds upon theory and current practice, should be viewed as indicating the future of student retention. There are vast numbers of support programs that have been proven to increase student retention; however, almost all require administrative funding to be successful. Predictive analytics help college administrators allocate funding and resources to programs that have the most impact on student retention.

The funnel analogy applies to the selection of subject areas for this literature review. The widest part of the funnel includes the theories, which provide explanation as to the variables and interactions that ultimately impact a student's decision to depart from an institution of higher education. The middle of the funnel contains research on practice in the form of student support programs designed to increase student retention. These programs are applicable in almost any higher education institution. Finally, the tip of the funnel narrows scope to linear regression and predictive analytics, which help college administrators identify students who are most at risk of dropping out. Although the statistical model for identifying students who are at risk is relatively

constant, the indicators that affect dropout behavior may vary greatly from institution to institution (Herzog, 2009; Stanley, 2012). This literature review highlights the gap in the current understanding of student departure that remains despite advancements in knowledge in the field and thus requires further exploration.

Evolving History of Student Retention

Higher education in the United States predates the country's establishment as a formal nation state and the development of its constitution (Komives, 2007). Harvard University, founded in 1636, is believed to be the first university in the United States (Harvard, 2015). Shortly thereafter, William and Mary College was founded in 1693. From 1700 through the early 1900s, less than 5% of the total U.S. population attended post-secondary institutions and were affluent white males (Komives, 2007). Furthermore, over two-thirds of graduates from the early colleges became pastors. The remaining graduates pursued fields in law and public life (Seidman, 2005). Following the end of the American Revolution, colleges emerged in the newly free states. During the early years of higher education, the number of students enrolled was so low that retention and graduation were never studied (Seidman, 2005).

Enrollment in colleges expanded rapidly in the early to mid 1800s. The economic crash of 1837 initiated a review of the role of higher education in the United States, creating a shift from only educating the clergy and social elite to a focus on working class families. Although the study of retention and graduation were not prevalent, extracurricular activities and literary societies began to form in order to foster loyalty to the institution (Seidman, 2005).

The American higher education system saw a dramatic increase in colleges and students attending shortly after the U.S. Congress passed the Morrill Act of 1862, which provided grants

of land to states with the purpose of financing institutions of higher education. The Morrill Act was originally meant to help states develop studies in agriculture and mechanical arts, but there were no restrictions with additional fields of study (Seidman, 2005).

By the early 1900s, colleges experienced record enrollments. In 1850, the average size of a college was 174 students. In 1915, some colleges served over 5,000 students, and nationally, there were over 110,00 students in 1,000 institutions (Seidman, 2005). Colleges began to serve as a central economic force by producing managers and professionals for the industrialized nation. Initially, early colleges had an open admissions policy for those who could afford the cost. As a result of the growth during the turn of the nineteenth century, colleges began to be more selective regarding the students they accepted (Seidman, 2005). During the early 1900s, institutions were more concerned with attracting students rather than retaining them.

The first study on student retention emerged in 1938 by John McNeely on behalf of the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Office of Education titled "College Student Mortality." This initial study is the first documented time that attrition, time to degree completion, academic pressure points, and other important factors was studied. Despite McNneely's (1938) initial study, the issue of student retention did not gain any ground as an important issue due to the great depression and the outbreak of World War II (Seidman, 2005).

Following the end of World War II, higher education underwent major changes. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the "GI Bill," is credited with having a major impact on the evolution of higher education (Seidman, 2005). The GI Bill provided a range of benefits for World War II veterans. In order to help the war veterans readjust to civilian life, the bill included the coverage of tuition and living expenses for those attending higher

education. After World War II, over 1.1 million members of the military utilized the GI Bill. This created a flood in enrollment for institutions across the nation and began a new chapter in the expansion of higher education (Seidman, 2005). Despite the swelling enrollment figures, little was done to understand the issue of student attrition. A handful of studies sought to examine the patterns of academic failure, but not student attrition (Seidman, 2005).

The rise in enrollment as a result of the GI Bill forced colleges to reconsider how they worked with students. The American Council on Education, a coalition of colleges and universities, held conferences in 1937 and 1949 to address the needs of students and developed a report, "The Student Personnel Point of View" (1937, 1949). The report helped colleges and their faculty adapt to the rapid changing environment of higher education (The American Council for Education, 1937, 1949). There were a few notable outcomes from the reports that are still visible in modern day higher education. First, it removed the notion that faculty needed to serve in loco parentis and were responsible for the acting in the best interest of the student. Second, it recognized higher education as a primary facilitator of students' maturation into holistic individuals. The focus was on the students' "well-rounded development—physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually, as well as intellectually" (The American Council for Education, 1949, p. 2). In doing so, it established the need for positions and departments within higher education to support such development. This shift removed the burden of responsibility from the faculty and instead highlighted the need for additional personnel on college campuses dedicated to student support. Although student retention and attrition were not the primary focus, the report began to set the backdrop for examining the phenomenon of student attrition in greater depth.

The 1960s sparked major changes for U.S. colleges and universities. Two notable pieces of legislation reshaped higher education. Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibited "discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance" (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). As a result of Title VI, colleges and universities were federally mandated to serve and permit enrollment for students of color, women, and students of varying religious beliefs. Almost all colleges and universities in the United States were ill prepared to meet the needs of diverse groups of students. Although the civil rights movement of the 1960s dramatically increased access to colleges and universities, research has shown that the long historical practice of institutional racism in U.S. higher education still impacts minority students today (Cross, 1991; Bell, 1993; Museus, 2006; Quaye and Harper, 2007).

The second piece of legislation that significantly altered the trajectory of higher education was President Lyndon Johnson's 1965 Higher Education Act. This act sought to provide federal funds to middle- and low-income students in financial need of help covering the costs of college. These grants are commonly referred to as "Pell Grants," named after Senator Claiborne Pell, who introduced the Bill to the Senate floor. The development of Pell Grants completely reshaped the demographics of students enrolling in higher education from predominantly affluent backgrounds to students from a range of socioeconomic ranges (Komives, 2007).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, student retention became an issue nationally among college administrators. Most notably, Tinto (1975) published "Dropouts from higher education: a theoretical synthesis of recent literature," which provided a theoretical model explaining the process of student attrition. Although Tinto's (1975) model built on earlier research on student retention by William Spady (1970), this landmark study is commonly credited with beginning

the national dialogue on the topic. Alexander Astin (1977, 1985) also helped further launch the issue into the national spotlight by adding that students' level of involvement through physical and psychological investment in higher education is a major contributor to the decision to maintain enrollment or not.

From the 1850s through the 1970s, higher education saw ongoing surges in enrollments. The 1980s saw the first time in a hundred years that colleges began to experience declines in enrollment (Seidman, 2005). At the time, enrollment management became a central focus for colleges and universities, and colleges began to realize that their potential recruitment pool was shrinking. They started competing heavily with one another for students and invested deeply in marketing, recruitment, retention, and financial aid (Seidman, 2005). Additionally, the U.S. government passed the Student's Right to Know Act in 1990 (NCES, 2016), which required all colleges and universities receiving Title IV federal funds to publicly disclose their retention and graduation rates. This meant prospective students and families could see the rates at which students were persisting and completing their intended degrees. The decline in enrollments as well as the increased competition for students forced colleges to focus on retaining the students already enrolled, a major paradigm shift from the focus a hundred years prior. With this shift in focus, research in the field of student retention boomed. Much of the literature of this time focused on the role of students' social engagement within the college and its impact on the decision to depart. However, Bean (1980) also found that students' pre-college characteristics, such as socioeconomic status, distance from home, and high school GPA, played a major role in predicting student attrition.

The student retention literature from the 1990s to the early 2000s became more centered on multiculturalism and student diversity as a result of the low retention and graduation rates for

minority students. Notable scholars such as Sam Museus (2008), Laura Rendon (1999), and Shaun Harper and Stephen Quaye (2007) have discussed the impact campus racial climates have on retention rates for minority students and have argued that the existence of systemic racism in American higher education is in itself a major impediment to retention and graduation for students of color. Furthermore, the literature during this period offered strategies to combat negative racial climates on campus and help minority students succeed (Cross, 1991; Rendon, 1999; Museus, 2008; Harper and Quaye, 2007).

Technology influences retention practices in the modern day (Tinto, 2012). Specifically, software programs such as GradesFirst and Starfish offer colleges and universities "early alert" systems for students who may be academically at risk based on students' initial academic behavior, such as truancy, missing assignments, low quiz and midterm scores. The software systems alert advisors and counselors so that they can conduct outreach and provide assistance. Additionally, new research with regard to student retention in the form of "predictive indicators" has emerged. John Stanley (2013) and Serge Herzog (2005) have utilized multinomial logistic regression to identify variables that make students most at risk of dropping out. Stanley (2013) and Herzog (2005) noted that the variables may vary from institution to institution. However, commonly examined variables include but are not limited to: financial aid offered, credit hours taken, first term GPA, enrollment in remediation, and on-campus employment. Looking ahead, Tinto (2012) argued that the study of student retention would soon focus on micro-level analyses of individual institutions and contexts rather than macro-level analyses of risk.

Opposition to Studying Retention

Low first-year student retention rates in higher education is a major problem for all stakeholders involved: individual, state, federal government, and society. However, there is

literature that fundamentally challenges the notion of college administrators taking a proactive approach toward retaining and graduating students. In the book *Academically adrift: Limited learning on college campuses,* lead researchers Arum and Roksa (2001) argued that student retention and graduation do not equate to student learning. Through their research, Arum and Roksa (2001) found that 45% of college students show no real gains in critical thinking in their first two years of college. They also found that less than half of all sophomores in their study reported that they had taken within the past two years a course requiring 40 pages of weekly reading and 20 pages of writing over the semester (Arum and Roksa, 2001). Despite these alarming findings, college administrators still receive an incredible amount of pressure from state and federal policymakers to retain and graduate students (Hersh and Merrow, 2005).

Some scholars have argued against students going directly to college right after high school, as it leads to burnout and higher college dropout rates (Loftus, 2014). More and more students are beginning to take a gap year when completing high school (Loftus, 2014). A gap year is a one year period in which students opt to not go directly to college straight out of high school. Historically, gap years were reserved for the very wealthy. However, it is becoming more popular amongst students from various backgrounds (Loftus, 2014). Research has shown that students who take a gap year on average have .1 - .4 higher GPAs compared to their peers who did not take a gap year. Not only do students tend to perform higher after the completion of a gap year, but the cost is also often less than tuition, books, and room and board (Loftus, 2014). Some administrators argue that more students taking a gap year will help with academic focus and degree completion (Loftus, 2014).

Current Theories Explaining Student Departure

Astin's Student Involvement Theory. Astin's 1999 article "Student involvement: A developmental theory of higher education" explained his theory on student involvement. He defined student involvement as the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to the academic experience (Astin, 1999). Astin's theory had five basic postulates relating to student involvement. The first referred to involvement as the amount of investment students place into various objects. The second postulate stated that regardless of the object, this involvement can occur along a continuum and vary greatly depending on the student and the object invested in. The third postulate stated that involvement has both qualitative and quantitative features. The fourth argued that the amount of student learning received from a program is a result of how much the student invests into the program, meaning the more a student puts into a program, the more the student will get out of it. The last postulate stated that the success of any educational program or policy is measured by its ability to increase the student's involvement (Astin, 1999).

Astin (1999) identified six areas of involvement that were significant in his research: place of residence, honors program, academic involvement, student-faculty interaction, and athletic involvement. However, he only discussed student-faculty interactions, described as those students who interact with their faculty, in relation to learning communities (Astin, 1999). This type of involvement is most strongly related to satisfaction with college than any other type of involvement.

Tinto: A Longitudinal Model of Dropout. Whereas Astin (1999) examined the factors that contribute to a college student staying, Tinto's (1975) theory explained the common reasons students decide to depart. In his model, Tinto (1975) offered a conceptual flow chart (see Figure

2) that identifies the interrelationships between variables and their impact on students' decision to dropout or stop-out.

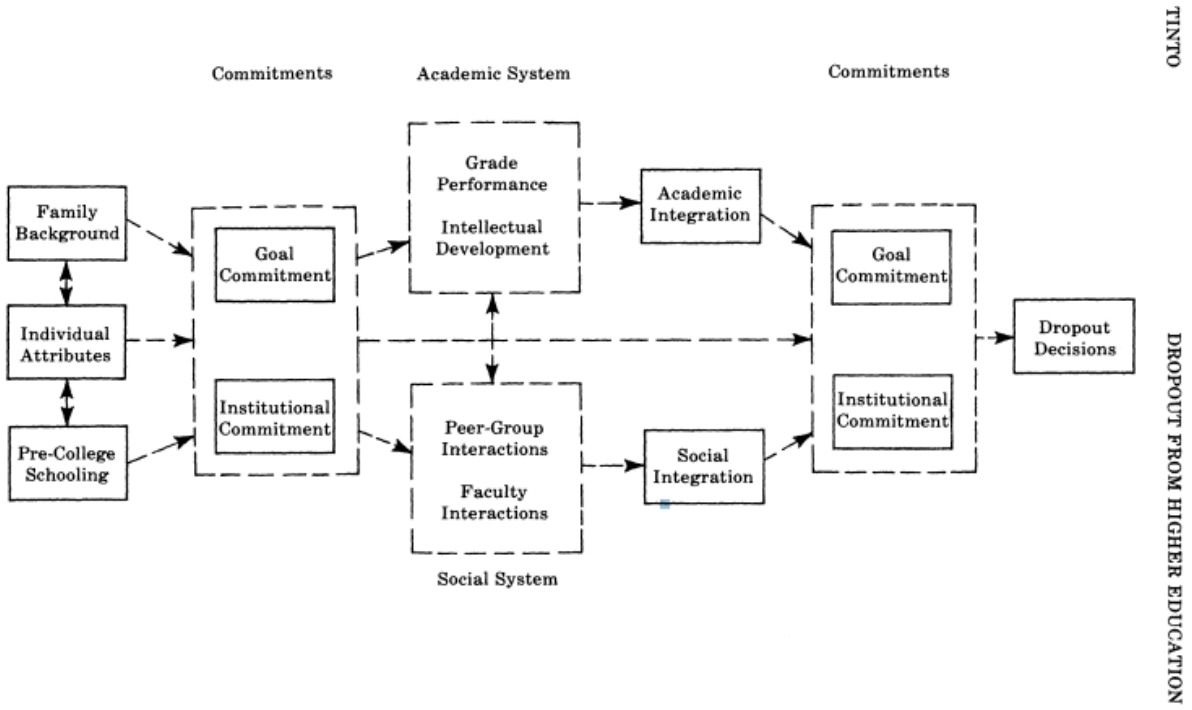


Figure 2. Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Departure (1975).

Tinto stated that "the process of dropout from college can be viewed as a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college" (Tinto, 1975, p. 94). Later, he stated that students enter higher education with a variety of characteristics such as: gender, ethnicity, ability, pre-college experiences: high school GPA, achievements, and family backgrounds: parental college attainment level, personal values, socioeconomic status (Tinto, 1993). He argued that all of these pre-college areas have a direct and indirect impact on a student's goal and institutional commitment, which in turn determine whether or not a student will depart from higher education (Tinto, 1993). The fundamental

argument of Tinto's (1993) model was that an individual's integration into the social and academic systems of the college over time is what most directly relates to his or her continuance in that college: "It is the person's normative and structural integration into the academic and social systems that lead to new levels of commitment" (p. 95). He did not discuss the role of students' intentions upon entering college in the model; rather, he stated that "other things being equal, the higher the degree of integration of the individual into the college systems, the greater will be to his commitment to the specific institution and to the goal of college completion" (Tinto, 1975, p. 96). Tinto's (1975) theory argued that a student's integration into the campus community was the primary predictor as to whether or not they would dropout.

Museus: Campus Racial Climate Model

Museus' (2008) campus climate model was formed in response to Tinto's (1975, 1993) and Astin's (1999) inability to explain why students of color were persisting at much lower rates than their white counterparts. Specifically, Museus stated that it is Tinto's (1975, 1993) "underlying assumption that racial minority students must separate from their traditional cultural traditions, values, and customs and adopt those of the predominantly White culture of their respective campus to succeed that has drawn criticism from higher education researchers" (Museus, 2008, p. 109). Alternatively, Museus (2008) argued that the responsibility of facilitating students' membership into campus environments should belong to the institutions of higher education (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1992, 1999). Furthermore, Museus (2008) argued that experiences with prejudice and discrimination have a detrimental impact on students' adjustment, sense of belonging, and institutional attachment (Museus, 2008). Museus (2008) cited these arguments as justification for studying the relationship between campus racial climate and baccalaureate degree completion.

Museus (2008) used data from the National Center for Education Statistics for the beginning postsecondary students. The final sample included 8,492 student surveys: included gender, socioeconomic status, high school GPA, citizenship, ethnicity, and financial aid awarded. The primary independent variable was students' perceived campus racial climate. The primary dependent variable was degree completion.

Museus conducted a statistical analysis to determine the findings and, from these findings, developed a conceptual model to explain the impact perceived racial climate has on degree completion. Figure 3 shows the model visually. In the model, he found that campus racial climates affects academic and social involvement, goal commitment, institutional commitment, and finally degree completion (Museus, 2008).

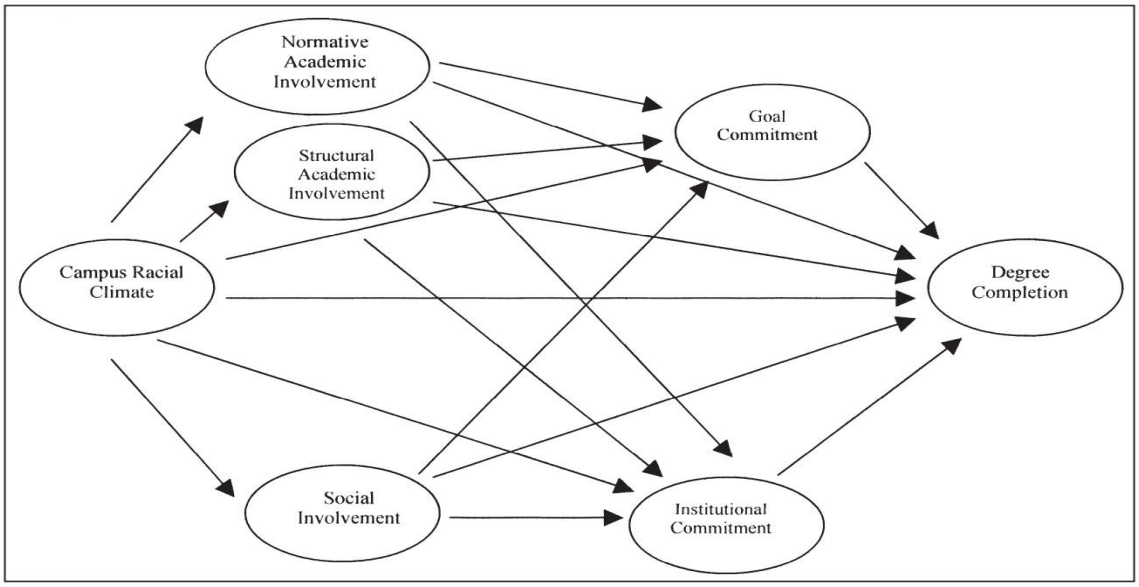


Figure 3. Museus Campus Racial Climate Model (2008)

The final model was statistically significant at explaining the variation among students from different ethnicities. Museus (2008) found that "perceived campus racial climate was the

most powerful predictor of institutional commitment for all four groups, exhibiting strong and positive effects for Asian (.22), Black (.40), Latina/o (.24), and White (.20) students" (p. 125). In short, he discovered key findings with regard to how the campus racial climate impacts the student experience. He stated, "Black students are the least satisfied with the racial climates on their campuses, it also supports the notion that perceptions of negative campus climates are not specific to Black students" (p. 127). Museus findings additionally demonstrated that greater satisfaction with the campus racial climate among Black students was associated with higher likelihood of degree attainment. For Asian students, higher levels of satisfaction with campus climate were associated with higher levels of grade performance (Museus, 2008).

In conclusion, Museus's (2008) findings demonstrated that campus racial climate does directly and indirectly affect retention and graduation. Museus (2008) offered suggestions for improving the campus racial climate to make students of color feel more welcome and accepted. The suggestions included the allocation of resources and funding for minority student retention programs, implementation of campus-wide culture awareness events, and increased diversity among faculty, staff, and student bodies (Museus, 2008).

Harper and Quaye. While Museus (2008) focused on how the campus racial climate can impact retention for students of color, Harper and Quaye (2007) offered avenues through which colleges can foster Black Identity expression and development, building their study on Cross' (1991) Black Identity development model. Cross (1991) argued that Black Identity development occurs over four stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization. In the pre-encounter stage, individuals express apathy about their own race and the race of other marginalized groups (Cross, 1991). In the encounter stage, individuals have a negative experience about their race. This initiates the consciousness of their race and fosters feelings of

anger, fear, frustration, shame, or other negative emotions. He described the immersion-emersion stage as strong positive feelings and emotions for their race and a genuine disinterest in White culture (Cross, 1991). In the internalization stage, individuals accept their identities and develop an awareness of what it means to be African American in a multicultural society (Cross, 1991).

With Cross' (1991) Black Identity development as a foundation, Harper and Quaye (2007) wanted to determine what venues within higher education would foster student success and development. They conducted a phenomenological study that examined high achieving African American students at primarily White institutions, asking participants questions about what influenced their development and success (Harper & Quaye, 2007). In total, 32 African American undergraduate male students across six institutions participated in the study. All of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 22. The researchers conducted one interview per participant averaging between two and three hours in length (Harper and Quaye, 2007).

Two sets of findings emerged from the data analysis. First, students who held leadership positions in Predominantly Black Organizations found it critical that they uplift the African American community on campus and abroad. Students felt it necessary to conduct outreach to help their fellow African American students. Furthermore, they deemed their involvement in the campus as crucial to dispelling negative stereotypes (Harper and Quaye, 2007). For students who participated in mainstream or predominately White organizations, they cited cross-cultural communication skills as the most important skills gained. Students "reported that they had successfully learned how to work with people who were different in terms of race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, ability, socio economic status, and religion," and they came to internalize the need to forge relationships with people from different backgrounds in order to be successful (Harper & Quaye, 2007, p. 137). Students who participated in the Predominantly

Black Organizations and students who participated in mainstream organizations both exhibited levels of internalization with their identity according to Cross's (1991) model.

Harper and Quaye (2007) offered a number of strategies for student affairs practitioners based on the findings. They recommended that student organizations, "both predominately black and mainstream should be marketed as outlets for African American men to learn more about themselves and others" (p. 141). However, they cautioned that "educators should be cognizant of the varied backgrounds African American men come from and therefore not assume that every student finds engagement in social work on behalf of disenfranchised populations on his campus appealing" (Harper & Quaye, 2007, p. 141). Additionally, they recommended that advisors and administrators encourage white student stakeholders to create a space for African American men and other underrepresented students to "offer culturally based ideas, programming, and advocacy" (Harper & Quaye, 2007, p. 141).

Cross (1991), Harper and Quaye (2007), and Museus (2008) focused their research on how systemic racism in American higher education impacts minority student retention and graduation. Their research is commonly grouped with a broader school of scholarship known as Critical Race Theory (CRT). Originally from critical legal studies and founded by Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, Critical Race Theory contends that systemic racism is embeded in the fabric of American Society (Yosso, 2005). It recognizes that institutional racism is pervasive in the dominant culture the individual racist need not to exist (Yosso, 2005). The theory identifies that these power structures are based on "White privilege and refutes the claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity" (Yosso, 2005, p. 73). The application of Critical Race Theory is not limited to legal and educational settings, but rather is multidisciplinary. Although Astin's (1999) and Tinto's

(1993) work is commonly used in the field of higher education retention, a major critique highlights that their research is based upon groups of White males (Museus, 2008). Furthermore, their research fails to recognize how systemic racism impacts students of color and in turn impinges on retention and graduation rates for such students. Therefore, future scholarship on the issue of student retention and graduation, including the present study, must incorporate the models of Museus (2008) and other CRT scholars to account for the diverse student populations present in American higher education.

First-Year Programs

There are a number of student support services that draw upon Astin's (1999) student involvement theory and Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Student Dropout, Museus (2008) Campus Climate Model, and Quaye and Harper's (2007) research that successfully increase first-year retention rates. Such research-based first-year support programs include: individual tutoring, supplemental instruction, learning communities, summer bridge programs, peer mentoring, and basic skills courses. Academic and social support programs are critical to student success and retention (Barefoot 1993; Congos, Langsam, & Schoeps 2003; Gordon, Young, & Kalianov, 2001; Drake, 2011; Rheinheimer & McKenzie, 2011; Tinto, 2012). In the following paragraphs, I synthesize the commonly utilized first-year programs at institutions of higher education which are implemented to improve retention and graduation rates.

Summer Bridge Programs. Summer bridge programs are designed to facilitate the students' transition from high school to college by placing them on campus the summer before their first semester. Students partake in academic coursework and receive a range of academic and social support services (Tinto, 2012). Students are commonly required to live on campus, where they participate in co-curricular programing after completing daily coursework. Summer

bridge programs help students gain critical academic and social support prior to the start of the fall semester and often lead to higher retention rates for individuals who participate (Tinto, 2012).

Peer Mentors. Social support plays a critical role in retaining students on college campuses. Research has shown that social support programs are crucial at helping first-generation, low income, and minority students (Tinto, 2012). Mentors help provide this form of social support by serving as a connecting link between the institution and the student being mentored (Tinto, 2012). Peer mentors help familiarize new students with campus life and may offer suggestive tips for success. An added benefit is that they develop strong rapport with their mentees, which proves useful in that the mentors learn of their mentees' personal difficulties before attrition takes place. Mentors then relay this information to professional staff who may offer further assistance to the struggling students (Tinto, 2012).

Basic Skills Coursework. Basic skills courses for students considered to be academically underprepared has been one of the longest standing forms of support in higher education (Tinto, 2012). This coursework includes English and math. The English classes have a significant writing focus and are designed for students who are not prepared for a college-level writing course. Similarly, math classes focus on a review of pre-algebraic concepts that are necessary for college-level algebra and calculus (Tinto, 2012). In California, it is estimated that nearly 75% of all incoming community college students require some form of basic skills coursework (Tinto, 2012). Despite the longstanding tradition of colleges offering this coursework, recent studies have demonstrated that few who begin at the lowest level of remediation finish the sequence (Tinto, 2012). Only approximately 31% of students referred for math remediation and 44% of students referred for English remediation go on to complete the course sequence. Furthermore,

fewer than 50% of those who complete the remediation sequence go on to receive a passing grade in a credit-bearing English or math course (Tinto, 2012). Given this alarming trend, colleges and state governments have begun taking steps to fix the issue.

First, state government has allocated major funding for faculty development in the areas of remedial math and science (Tinto, 2012). For example, California's "Basic Skills Initiative" allocates funding to faculty who seek ways to improve their pedagogy (Tinto, 2012). Second, colleges are seeking ways to redesign their basic skills courses. One model that has proven to be successful involves eliminating remediation courses all together. Instead, a supplemental instruction or lab is required that runs parallel to the credit-bearing course (Tinto, 2012).

Supplemental Instruction. Supplemental instruction is a form of academic support that provides help through study groups connected to a specific course. The support received through supplemental instruction allows students to "immediately apply support to the task required by [the] course to which the group is connected" (Tinto, 2012, p. 36). It is often implemented in courses that have historically high fail ratios, such as math and chemistry. The benefits of supplemental instruction are maximized when participants attend consistently and frequently. Research has shown that when students attend supplemental instruction sessions regularly, it improves their academic performance improves and the rate at which they fail the connected course decreases (Congos, 2003; Congos, Schopes, & Schoeps 2003; Tinto, 2012; Wright, Wright, & Lamb, 2002).

Financial Aid. Financial support in the form of work study and scholarships has proven to have a profound impact on student retention (Tinto, 2012). Work study is most effective when the work aligns closely with a student's major or field of interest, and it helps facilitate interactions with fellow students, staff, and faculty. However, overreliance on work study may

also impede student success, as it draws time away from studying. Scholarship incentives based on need and satisfactory academic progress are also quite helpful with increasing retention rates (Tinto, 2012). For example, Delgado Community College in Los Angeles, California, offered scholarship incentives of $2,000 per participating student over the course of an academic year. As part of the requirements for receiving the scholarship, students had to maintain full-time enrollment and achieve a minimum semester GPA of 2.0. Students who participated in the program were more likely to register for classes following the end of their first year (Tinto, 2012).

First-Year Seminars. Freshman seminars come in many different forms and serve a variety of purposes for first-year students. Some seminar designs provide information about academic requirements and introduce students to the academic community. Other designs focus on helping students acquire tools essential for academic life and college success, such as study skills, time-management strategies, and goal-setting practices (Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, & Gabelnick, 2004; Tinto, Goodsell, & Russo, 1993; Tinto & Goodsell, 1994; Tinto, 2012). The breadth of students served also varies based on institutional need. Some institutions mandate that all first-year students partake in a freshman seminar, whereas other institutions primarily focus on serving students who are academically at risk or underrepresented on campus. Freshman seminars are commonly combined with academic learning communities in order to serve as a connecting link between the various courses. Despite the numerous designs of freshman seminars, all forms seek to employ a range of activities to build social and academic support within the institution (Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, & Gabelnick, 2004; Tinto, Goodsell, & Russo, 1993; Tinto & Goodsell, 1994; Tinto, 2012.)

Learning Communities. Learning communities positively impact GPA and retention rates for first-year students (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; Tinto, 2012). The design of a learning community includes groups of students enrolled in two or more courses linked by a common theme; classroom learning focused on community building; a focus on target groups, such as academically at-risk students, underrepresented students, and honors students; and an integrating seminar for credit (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; Tinto, 2012). It is important to note that many institutions often make adaptations to the model to best suit students' needs.

In addition to improving student retention rates, learning communities intentionally focus on increasing student-to-student and student-faculty interaction (Barefoot, 2000). Furthermore, learning communities link curriculum and co-curricular activities to help enhance students' undergraduate experience. They also aim to increase students' time on campus by building community and group affiliation (Barefoot, 2000). By focusing on all of these areas, learning communities are able to help students overcome academic boredom, difficulties in the transition to college, academic under-preparedness, and disconnection from the institution.

There are clear connections between Astin's (1999) theoretical model and implementation of learning communities at institutions of higher education. Most notably, his theory focused on student-to-student interaction and student-faculty interaction as key areas of involvement that lead to student success, both of which are emphasized through participation in a learning community (Astin, 1999). Furthermore, his third postulate argued that involvement has both qualitative and quantitative features, which aligns with learning communities' objectives to increase the time students spend participating in the campus community.

Limitations to Program Success. There is extensive research that demonstrates learning communities and first-year programs are successful at increasing student retention and

engagement within institutions of higher education (Drake, 2011; Gordon, Young, & Kalianov, 2001; Rheinheimer & McKenzie, 2011). However, a major limitation to the success of learning communities, supplemental instruction, summer bridge programs, and many other first-year programs is the notion of "self-selection." Self-selection refers to the concept that students sign up for programs or initiatives out of their own volition (Pike, Hansen, & Lin, 2010). Critics have highlighted that students who partake in first-year experience initiatives are likely the same students who persist without the option, as these students took a proactive step toward seeking campus resources by signing up for the programs (Pike, Hansen, & Lin, 2010). As it relates to Astin's (1999) theory, students made a conscious intention to invest in their higher education experience by self-selecting into a learning community.

The literature on available on the issue of student retention is quite extensive. Despite the current scholarship on the subject matter, there is still a gap in the literature with regard to understanding student intentions. The current study highlights that there is a small percentage of incoming students who are entering college, specifically UH Mānoa, without the intention of obtaining a degree at the institution of origin. The driving question behind this research, then, is why.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This study seeks to answer the question: Why do first-time degree seeking students at a large public research university indicate they plan to leave, stop-out or dropout, prior to the start of classes? "An essential aspect of any research study is the collection of evidence to serve as the basis for answering the research questions…. Researchers identify an overall approach to the study's design and engage in the step of collecting or gathering data" (Plano-Clark & Creswell, 2010, p. 9). A research design provides a roadmap for collecting data, analyzing data, and reporting the results (Plano-Clark & Creswell, 2010). The following pages review the chosen methodology for this research inquiry.

Theoretical Construct

Theory serves as a guiding force behind practice and research (McDade, 1999). Theory serves as a construct to help explain relationships, estimate probability, and discuss how something works (Mcdade, 1999.) As discussed through the literature review, many high impact practices were grounded in theory that emphasizes involvement, student demographics, and pre-college schooling (Astin, 1999; Tinto, 1993). However, this research inquiry seeks to understand student intentions rather than review institutional access and programming which help increase student retention.

John P. Bean (2005) engaged in over 20 empirical studies from 1975-2005 that researched the issue of student retention and identified nine common themes across all of his research. Bean's (2005) nine themes were: intentions, institutional fit and commitment, psychological processes and key attitudes, academics, social factors, bureaucratic factors, the external environment, the student's background, and money and finance. Bean's (2005) nine

themes on student retention were derived from Fishbein and Ajzen's (1980) research on behavior and motivation. Fishbein and Ajzen (1980) argued that behavior is directly linked to intentions. Bean (2005) expanded the research further and applied it to the issue of first year student retention. Bean's (2005) nine themes serve as the theoretical construct for this research inquiry. Furthermore, Bean's theoretical construct guided the development of the semi-structured interview questions (See Appendix B: Interview Crosswalk).

Intentions. Bean (2005) argued that intentions to behave in a certain manner precede that behavior. Bean (2005) stated the

> intention to leave variable was the best predictor of actual student departure from college. In empirical studies, after controlling statistically for intent, it was rare that other variables were significantly related to leaving. The variable is important as an indicator of who is going to leave (p. 218).

This variable decays over time, meaning, the less time between the student's intention and the anticipated behavior, the more accurate the prediction. Understanding students intentions to leave or stay can prove to be helpful for an institution when attempting to develop retention programs (Bean 2005). Student intentions for older, commuter, and part-time students are less salient, as there are likely other external factors such as funding, job responsibilities, or family responsibilities which prevent students from returning (Bean 2005). Bean noted that intention is an "empty variable because it does not help explain why students leave. It only predicts who will leave" (p. 219). Given that there is little understanding on the explination behind student intentionality, there is clear need for the study.

Institutional Fit and Commitment. Bean (2005) identified two sets of attitudes experienced by students which impact their decision to depart. The first set of attitudes addresses

students “sense of belonging” with their peers. Bean (2005) stated “A student is likely to fit in if that student shares values with other students.” which “could be social (we’re here to party), academic (we’re here to study) or of any area interest (we’re here to be lawyers or actors)” (p. 219). Any form of discrimination, be it gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic, or other, would negatively impact students’ sense of belonging (Bean, 2005). A secondary key attitude which will impact students’ decision to depart is their sense of commitment, or loyalty, to their inst. Bean (2005) noted that administrators and student affairs professionals should not only be focused on providing services, but also place emphasis on delivering the services in a manner which leads students to have a positive perception of the college and their educational experience.

Academics. Bean (2005) discussed the notion that faculty often identify high GPA with high IQs. However, he stated this is a common myth, and GPA is much more complicated than “High IQ=High GPA” (p. 220). Granted, students that attend highly selective institutions generally persist at much higher level compared to students that attend open enrollment institutions (Bean, 2005). However, involuntary dismissal due to poor academic results may not be an involuntary action. Bean (2005) referenced an example of a student who attends the alma mater of her parents, despite it not being their first choice. In this example, a student may be “involuntarily dismissed” due to poor academics, but, the action of receiving poor grades was done so purposefully. As such, Bean (2005) cautions administrators when trying to distinguish between involuntary and voluntary withdrawal. Students interact with the academic resources in four different ways, they are: courses taken, faculty, advising, and GPA. Courses taken and Faculty are ultimately intertwined because neither can exist without the other. Faculty are able to support or hinder students’ overall self perception and sense of academic confidence. Academic

advising is often used as an excuse for leaving. However, advising that links "student's academic capabilities with his or her choice of courses and major, access to learning resources" leads to greater levels of retention (p. 226) Lastly, low GPA has direct connections to students leaving involuntarily.

Psychological Processes and Key Attitudes. Bean (2005) discussed three psychological processes which impact student's academic and social factors. They are: self-efficacy, approach/avoidance behavior, and internal locus of control. Self-efficacy refers to a student's ability to adapt to situation and overcome obstacles. Naturally, self-efficacy leads to greater levels of self-efficacy over time. It is important to note, that self-efficacy in one area of life, may not necessarily lead to self-efficacy in other areas. An example can be seen through academics and social interactions. Students with self-efficacy in social interactions may not have the same degree of self-efficacy with their academics. The same is true vice versa. Bean (2005) noted that students who adopt approach behaviors over avoidant to their stressors are likely to utilize resources which will help them succeed, such as library, tutoring, office hours. Lastly, Bean (2005) stated that an internal locus of control is a vital attitude for students to possess. An internal locus of control leads students to believe that high grades are a product of strong study habits. Conversely, students with an external locus of control credit luck or a teacher with their success (Bean, 2005).

Social Factors. Bean (2005) reviewed previous studies which emphasized the role that social relationships can have with student retention (Chickering, 1969; Perry, 1970; Tinto, 1993). Bean (2005) noted that "friendship is difficult to measure... but rather... the number of friends seems less important than a student having one or a small number of close friends at the college" (p. 228). Students receive a great deal of satisfaction from friendships and this helps feelings of

self-confidence. Social support extends beyond peers, it also includes faculty and staff. Bean (2005) stated " social connectedness leads to satisfaction, self-confidence, loyalty, fitting in, and remaining enrolled" (p. 229).

Bureaucratic Factors. Bureaucratic factors referred to the interaction between students and service providers at the institution. Common interactions between the student and professional offices on a campus included: admissions, financial aid, orientation, registration, class attendance, athletic programs, and advising (Bean, 2005). Negative interactions between the student and the aforementioned resources can leave the student feeling extreemly disheartened. Conversely, students who feel helped and empowered are likely to feel loyal to the institution and be retained. Bean (2005) noted that institutions needed to balance the ability to work operate efficiently with demonstrating care for the individual student.

External Environment. Bean (2005) highlighted that "students can be pulled out of school by forces beyond their control and beyond the control of the institution" (p. 232). The term "external environment" is meant to account for all variables that are outside of the control of the institution or individual which impact student retention. Variables can include but are not limited to: significant others, family responsibilities, work opportunities, and transfer opportunities. The role of a significant other can be a powerful influence in drawing a student away from college, despite their overall satisfaction with the institution. In such circumstances, both the university and the individual have done everything to help prevent issues of attrition (Bean, 2005).

Student's Background. A student's background was viewed as their educational goals, high school grades, class rank, standardized test scores, success in a college preparatory curriculum, and parents' education, occupation, and income (Bean, 2005). Students with higher

grades, ability, and socioeconomic status, historically succeeded at much higher rates. Institutions that have open admissions policies have the lowest retention rates. If institutions of higher education become more selective, thereby altering the profile of incoming students (e.g., academic ability, socioeconomic status, and educational goals), then retention rates will increase. However, it is not always possible or ethical to change the profile of incoming students. As such institutions that admit large freshmen classes of low ability must focus financial resources towards retention programming and academic support programs (Bean, 2005).

Money and Finance. Money has a major role in higher education. Institutions of higher education must seek multiple sources of funding in order to meet operational costs. Sources of funding may include: state appropriations, federal grants, philanthropic gifts, research grants, and tuition. When institutions fail to raise enough funds through multiple means, they are then forced to rely heavily on student tuition to cover operating costs (Bean, 2005). Financial assistance to help students from low socioeconomic backgrounds had the greatest retention impact. Although it can be challenging to establish equilibrium between operating costs and tuition for students, Bean (2005) stated institutions should use the discretion available to provide financial aid to the most needy; as lower institutional costs are associated with higher retention rates.

Description of Site and Program

The site for this research inquiry took place at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM). The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa was founded in 1907 in response to the Morrill Act as a land-grant College of Agriculture. In 1920, the College of Arts and Science was added, and henceforth became the University of Hawai‘i. In 1972 it was renamed The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa and now serves as the flagship campus for a ten campus system. The campus size is over 320 acres. The University of Hawai’i system motto is: “*Maluna a`e o nā lāhui a pau ke ola*

ke kanaka," meaning, "Above all nations is humanity" (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Catalog, 2015). According to the Carnegie Foundation (2010), UHM is designated as a Doctoral (Research University/Very High Research Activity) institution, offering 51 doctoratal degrees, 87 master's degrees, and 87 bachelor degrees. UHM has the prestigious designation of being a land-, sea-, and space-grant institution. As of Fall 2014, UHM has a total student population of over 19,000 students, with approximately 14,000 undergraduates and 5,000 graduate students. UHM has representation from all fifty states and over 126 countries. The geographic and demographic ratios are: resident students (Hawai'i) represent approximately 66% of the student population, out-of-state students represent about 28% of students, and international students represent about 6% of the overall student body population. Roughly 36.1% of students self-identify as Asian, 23% of students self-identify as Caucasian, 17% of students self-identify as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 13% of students self-identify as multiracial, 6% self-identify as International, 1.7% self-identify as Hispanic, 1.4% self-identify as African American, .3% self identify as American Indian or Alaskan Native (MIRO, 2014).

It is important to note the retention and graduation rates both through geographic and demographic characteristics. The cohort year 2007 was selected and will be shared in subsequent two tables visually because it is the most recent year in which graduation data has been published by the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Institutional research office.

Table 3

Student Retention and Graduation Rates - by Geographic Origin

Geographic Origin	Number of Students	First Year Retention Rate	Six Year Graduation Rate
State of Hawai‘i	1,116	84.1% (n=981)	64.9% (n=757)
U.S. Mainland	515	61.3% (n=460)	36.5% (n=188)
International	45	86.7% (n=39)	71.1% (n=32)

******The Table consists of first-time incoming students only. Although transfer and graduate students make up a large portion of the student body population, they are excluded from the data. Furthermore, data has remained relatively consistent (+/- 3%) for Resident and U.S. Mainland students from 2007 to present.

Table 4

Student Retention and Graduation Rates- by Ethnicity

Race	Number of Students	First Year Retention Rate	Six Year Graduation Rate
Asian	765	85.8% (n=704)	73.5% (n=562)
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	265	78.9% (n=209)	55.8% (n=148)
Caucasian	400	63.5% (n=254)	39.5% (n=158)
Multiracial	155	76.1% (n=118)	56.1% (n=87)
Hispanic/Latino	44	59.1% (n=26)	40.9% (=18)
American Indian or Alaska Native	9	55.6% (n=5)	55.6% (n=5)
African American or Black	27	81.5% (n=22)	44% (n=12)

As demonstrated through Table 3, the retention rate for out-of-state students is 23 percentage points lower compared to their resident peers. There has been speculation amongst adminstrators about why this may be happening among University of Hawai‘i, however, previous research inquiries (Abele, 2014; UHM Leaver Study 2006, 2012) have not directly

examined this phenomenon or offered any type of explanation. The purpose of this study is to seek to understand why do first-time degree seeking students at a large public research university indicate they plan to leave (stop-out or dropout) prior to the start of classes? Although addressing 23 percentage points retention difference between resident and nonresidents in not the central focus of the study, the researcher investigated this as a sub-issue through the sample selection and interview questions.

Research Paradigm

The chosen methodology for this research inquiry is case study. A "case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system. (Creswell, 2011, p. 73)". Case study draws upon in-depth data collections, such as interviews, observations, audio-visual materials, documents, and reports (Creswell, 2007). This research utilized a collective case study methodology. In a collective case study there is one issue examined, however the researcher may select multiple research participants or sites in order to illustrate the issue. The researcher may use multiple participants or sites to offer different perspectives on the same issue (Cresswell, 2011). For the purpose of this study, multiple research participants were recruited in order to fully explore the issue of first year students attending a large public research university without the intention of completing a baccalaureate degree.

Case Study Procedures for Treating, Coding, and Analyzing Data

Merriam (1998) discussed several critical procedures for case studies. Firstly, the researcher must decide if a case study is a pertinent methodology for the issue being examined. Next, the researcher must identify their case, and whether they will be single or collective, multi-sited or within. When determining a case, the researcher must utilize purposeful sampling in order to identify participants and/or site that will fully illuminate the issue being researched

(Creswell, 2007). Next, the researcher must collect extensive and in-depth data, drawing from multiple sources of information. Data typically includes but is not limited to: interviews, observations, participant journals, and physical artifacts. *In-vivo* was the primary means for coding, and treating data. In Vivo coding "uses words or short phrases from the participant's own language in the data records as codes" (Saldana, 2013, p. 264). In Vivo coding helped enable me to capture the students' voice.

Analysis of the data takes place through two stages, within-case and cross-case (Creswell, 2007). During the within-case analysis stage, the researcher must provide a comprehensive description and illuminate themes within each case. Next, the researcher begins to conduct a cross-case analysis, in which themes are analyzed across cases. Following the analysis, the researcher begins to draw assertions, which is the interpretations from the data and the meaning of the case (Creswell, 2007).

Sample Population and Selection

Being that this research inquiry seeks to understand why students attend a public-four year institution without the intention of obtaining a degree, purposeful sampling must be conducted in order to identify or recruit the appropriate research participants who match this research question. Potential research participants were identified by their stated Educational Objectives. All incoming students must indicate their educational objectives prior to the start of their first semester at UH Mānoa. Student responses to their indicated educational objectives were pulled from Banner. Below, Table 5 lists the questions concerning educational objectives as it appears to students and their responses:

Table 5

UHM Educational Objectives - Combined Total

2014 Cohort		
Immediate educational goal at my home campus:	Number	Percent
Earn a certificate	32	2.15%
Earn an associate's degree (2-year)	0	0.00%
Earn a bachelor`s degree (4-year)	1338	89.80%
Take courses to transfer to another college	60	4.03%
Take courses, but not towards a degree	7	0.47%
Not sure (I am not sure any of the above statements apply to me)	53	3.56%
Total	1490	100.00%

Combined total of responses for resident and nonresident students. Question seeks to understand what the degree seeking objectives of students.

Students who indicated they "plan to transfer," "take courses but not towards a degree," or "not sure," were contacted and asked if they would be agreeable to participate in the research inquiry. Students were recruited via email based upon their educational objectives. I emailed students at the beginning of the fall semester to determine if they wanted to participate in the study. Seven students were part of the First Year Programs and were contacted in person to see if they wanted to participate in the study. All research participants received a $25 Amazon or Starbucks gift card as incentive for participation. Interviews lasted approximately one hour and I asked questions outlined in Appendix A: Interview Protocol. Midway through the interviews with the nonresident student population, I added a question not listed in the interview protocol. I asked, "If I could wave a magic wand to help you stay at UHM, what would change your intention?" Funding for the gift cards was sponsored by the Office of the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Education at UH Mānoa.

I utilized maximum variation, when applicable for recruiting research participants. Maximum variation seeks to aim for heterogeneity across participants (Merriam, 1993). Maximum variation allowed me (the researcher) to understand multiple perspectives regarding the issue of first year students attending an institution of higher education without the intention of graduating (Merriam, 1993). Recognizing that there is a relatively small group to recruit from, the greatest emphasis of heterogeneity was placed on students' geographic origin. I sought to recruit a minimum of ten participants from the State of Hawai‘i, and ten participants from the continental United States. International students were excluded due to insufficient number of potential research participants. Below are Table 6 and Table 7, which include aggregate demographic and academic background information about the research participants.

Table 6

Research Participants Demographic and Academic Information

Resident Research Participants							
Gender	Self-Identified Ethnicity	Major 1	First Term GPA	Residency	On Campus Housing	High School GPA	State
Female	Caucasian or White	Elementary Education	3.01	Resident	No		HI
Male	Caucasian or White	Theatre	3.40	Resident	No	3.4	HI
Female	Chinese; Filipino	Creative Media	3.74	Resident	No	3.89	HI
Male	Filipino; Japanese	Computer Science	3.39	Resident	Yes	3.97	HI
Female	Filipino	Pre-Nursing	3.25	Resident	No	3.83	HI
Male	Filipino	Nursing	3.52	Resident	No	3.9	HI
Female	Chinese; Filipino; Japanese	Sociology	3.57	Resident	No	3.91	HI
Female	Japanese; Amer Indian or Alaskan Native; Chinese; Other Asian; Caucasian or White	Sec Education, English	3.28	Resident	No		HI
Female	Other Asian	Travel Industry Management	2.73	Resident	No	3.85	HI
Male	Caucasian or White; Filipino; Native Hawaiian or Part-Hawn	Human Resource Management	3.30	Resident	Yes	3.2	HI

Blank variables indicate no data available.

Table 7

Research Participants Demographic and Academic Information

Nonresident Research Participants							
Gender	Self-Identified Ethnicity	Major 1	First Term GPA	Residency	On Campus Housing	High School GPA	State
Male	Filipino; Caucasian or White	Pre-Nursing	2.76	Non-Resident	Yes	4.02	FL
Female	African American or Black	Exploratory Business	3.35	N/R WUE Exemption	Yes	2.9	CA
Female	Caucasian or White	Elementary Education	3.24	N/R WUE Exemption	Yes	3.65	AK
Male	Caucasian or White; Korean	General (Pre-Business)	3.01	N/R WUE Exemption	Yes	3.36	WA
Male	Caucasian or White	General (Pre-Business)	2.85	N/R WUE Exemption	Yes	3.58	CA
Female	Caucasian or White	General (Pre-Business)	2.11	N/R WUE Exemption	Yes	3.12	CO
Male	Caucasian or White	Biology	2.89	N/R WUE Exemption	Yes	3.58	WA
Female	Caucasian or White	KRS, Health & Exercise Science	3.01	N/R WUE Exemption	Yes	3.20	CA
Female	Caucasian or White	Elementary Education	3.89	N/R WUE Exemption	Yes		HI
Female	Caucasian or White	Exploratory Business	4.00	N/R WUE Exemption	Yes	2.65	WA
Female		Biology	3.10	N/R WUE Exemption	Yes		

Blank Variables indicate no data available. N/R WUE refers to students who are nonresidents and receive the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) tuition cost. WUE tuition is 150% of in-state resident tuition. Nonresident students who do not receive the WUE discount pay 300% of in-state resident tuition.

Procedures for Collecting Data and Instrumentation

Interviews are a primary means of data collection for case studies because the researcher is able to gain deep insight into the central phenomenon of the study. Furthermore, interviews allow the researcher control over the types of information received (Plano-Clark & Creswell, 2010). This study drew upon one on one interviews and First Year Programs assessment reports as the primary means of data collection. One on one interviews are a data collection process where the researcher asks questions and records answers from only one participant at a time (Plano-Clark & Creswell, 2010). Open ended questions are used to allow the "research participant to create their own narrative" (Plano-Clark & Creswell, 2010, p. 259). A structured interview protocol was used to help maintain consistency across the interviews. The interview protocol includes instructions for the process of the interview and list the questions to be asked. The protocol used for this study can be found in Appendix A. It is important to note that the interview was semi-structured and interview probes were used when the researcher deems applicable. Probes are sub-questions in which the researcher uses to elicit more data from the participant (Plano-Clark & Cresswell, 2010).

Research participants were interviewed after the 13th week of the start of the Fall semester. The decision was made to interview after the 13th week because I had power over some participant's grades in CAS 110: Access to the College Community course. CAS 110 is a one unit integrating seminar designed to help students adjust to college life. The class ends after the 12th week to allow students ample time to study for finals in other coursework. In total, seven of the participants were enrolled in CAS 110. I waited until after the course concluded and grades were submitted to eliminate any conflict of interest and other potential ethical concerns that may arise from conducting research with those with whom I have power over.

Ensuring Credibility

Ensuring credibility is arguably one of the most important aspects of any research inquiry. Credibility helps build trustworthiness in the findings, which in turn, allows practitioners to utilize findings in professional practice (Merriam, 1998). This study drew upon: member checking, peer examination, triangulation, iterative interviewing, as qualitative techniques to ensure the credibility in the findings (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Member checking is the process where the findings are shared with the research participants. Member checking allows the researcher participants the opportunity to agree, disagree, and provide feedback based on the assertions of the study (Creswell, 2007).

Peer examination involves sharing the study's design, process, and findings with fellow colleagues or doctoral students (Anney, 2014). The principal investigator of this inquiry is a current Faculty member at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa and is well positioned to share the study with more experienced colleagues for constructive feedback. Triangulation is the process whereby the researcher "uses different sources of data or research instruments, such as interviews, focus group discussion or participant observation, or that utilizes different informants to enhance the quality of the data from different source" (Anney, 2014, p. 277). This research inquiry used the following: artifact sharing, semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, as data to help identify and corroborate themes. Iterative interviewing is a helpful strategy for identifying falsehoods stated by research participants. Iterative questioning is implemented by the "use of probes to elicit detailed data . . . in which the researcher returns to matters previously raised . . . and extracts related data through rephrased questions" (Shenton, 2004, p. 67).

Considerations of Human Subjects

This study has been approved by the University of Hawai‘i Human Studies Program as exempt from federal regulations pertaining to the protection of human research participants. See Appendix C: CHS# 23482 - A paradigm shift: revisiting the issue of first year student retention.

Limitations

This study has a few notable limitations. First, the study was based on the premise that students are attending institutions of higher education without the intention of completing a degree. There is quantitative institutional data (Students' Educational Objectives, UHM Leaver Study, and CIRP survey data) that supports this notion, however, the data serves as indicators rather than evidence of actual outcomes. Secondly, the study is bounded to the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. The findings yielded from the study may not be generalizable to all institutions of higher education. Finally, the study is in partial fulfillment of a doctoral degree in Education. As such, I am a novice researcher and limited by the amount of time, experience, and financial resources available. These limitations may likely impact the scope, depth, and breadth of the study.

Chapter 4: Findings

Chapter Overview

This chapter discusses the findings from the data collection and is separated into several sections. The first section provides a within-case analysis for nonresident research participants at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa. The second section provides a within-case analysis for resident students at the University. The sections discuss major themes found as a result of coding and analyzing. I collected this data through individual interviews with 10 resident students and 11 nonresident students.

Next, a cross-case analysis section highlights the parallels and divergences between the two sample populations. I utilized Cresswell (2007) and Saldana's (2013) methods for coding and analyzing the data. During first cycle coding, I carefully coded and analyzed all transcripts that were connected to the research question or theoretical frame. For second cycle coding, I analyzed the first cycle coding and transformed the codes to categories. After rigorous analysis, themes began to emerge across cases. I analyzed the categories across the two separate populations and developed themes. Creswell (2007) identified the data spiral as best practice for qualitative research. Following the within-case and cross-case analysis sections, I apply my findings to Bean's "Nine Themes of College Student Retention" (2005). The final section offers a chapter summary. In order to protect participant anonymity, I have assigned pseudonyms, such as "JK" or "AA," to the research participants of both groups, resident and nonresident (n=21).

The interview questions that I developed are closely connected to the theoretical framework used for this inquiry, John P. Bean's nine themes of student retention (See Appendix B: Interview Crosswalk). Each individual question did not touch on all of Bean's (2005) nine

themes. Collectively, however, all questions spanned across the nine themes. The questions and subsequent data collected from research participants helped support Bean's nine themes for understanding student retention. The interview questions and responses from participants also led to new understandings discussed below with regard to student departure.

Within-Case Analysis: Nonresidents

Overview

Two overarching themes arose from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa nonresident research participants based upon interviews, students' self-identified educational objectives, analytic memos, and their decision to re-enroll for their sophomore year. I used In Vivo coding to develop codes, categories, and finally themes. The central theme for nonresident students was finances. From the central theme, four sub-themes emerged: closer to home, transportation issues, uncertain, and poor facilities. The central theme and sub-themes are tied to the driving question behind this research: Why do students indicate that they plan to leave (stop-out or dropout) prior to the first day of coursework? I partitioned the sub-themes between the central theme as there was an apparent relationship within the data. I discuss the connections between the central theme and sub-themes in the ensuing paragraphs.

Finances

The central theme that appeared among nonresident students was finances. Students regularly cited the high cost of tuition and living as being the primary drivers of why they plan to leave UH Mānoa. For example, research participant AC stated in our individual interview:

> I do want to stay here, but at the same time if it's easier and cheaper it seems like the better thing is to go I guess. I guess what would make me stay probably be like maybe

cheaper or like if my financial aid would have been better. (AC, personal communication, November 16, 2015)

Finances served as the central theme for nine out of the 10 participants. Figure 4 highlights the connections between the central theme and sub-themes.

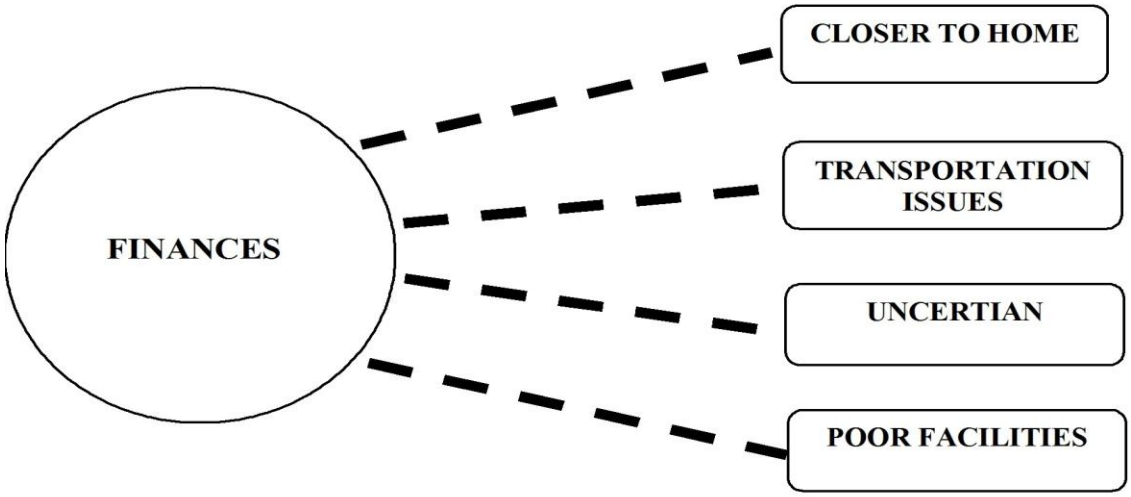


Figure 4. The figure illustrates the connections between the central theme and sub-themes.

The driving research question for the study is "Why do first-time degree seeking students at a large public research university indicate they plan to leave (stop-out or dropout) prior to the start of classes?" I asked students to participate in the study based on their responses to the educational objectives questionnaires located in their student records, and I specifically sought students who indicated that they plan to transfer. The timeline in which students complete the educational objectives questionnaire is directly tied to the central theme. Questionnaire administrators prompted students to indicate their educational goals right before registering or paying for classes, which they do approximately one to two weeks prior to the start of the

semester. Once the bill comes, however, students realize just how much their entire educational experience will cost at UH Mānoa. For example, research participant NN stated:

> There's couple of different times I was talking to my friend who is from here and she lives here and she told me that she only pays around like $10,000 a year to go here and I was like Wow! So her whole four year education is going to be like the equivalent of one of my years. Like I think her whole college education in one year of mine. (NN, personal communication, November 17, 2015)

Another student, LA, indicated that UH Mānoa was her top choice, but that the financial burden was just too great for her and her family. She stated, "Initially this is just my top pick and that's where I wanted to go why because it seems like a good idea that location obviously" (LA, personal communication, November 15, 2015). She proceeded, "I was excited and just turned out as little too much money than me and my family can afford." When I asked her why she was planning on leaving, she replied, "So it's mostly this financial issue. In fact, it's like 100% financial reasons." Clearly, finances were the driving factor in the student's intention to leave UH Mānoa.

Even for students who came from more affluent families, finances was still a crucial factor influencing the decision to leave UH Mānoa. In the case of AA, the student had almost $100,000 set aside by caregivers to help cover the cost of education. He articulated that the cost influenced his decision to leave:

> So I have enough money to have like $22,000 every year and so that would like get me through four years here but it won't get me past like six. So I'm trying like to think ahead because if I go home like I could get through probably like four but now probably like. . . I don't know how much but I could also probably like going to my grad school. So just

> trying to think that I really know what I should do because I plan on going on like six years. (AA, personal communication, November 13, 2015)

AA said he does have positive feelings toward the university and has made strong social relationships: "I do want to stay here and like finish it out because I made a lot of cool friends here. But then it's cheaper every way to go home" (personal communication, November 13, 2015 at 10:30am). From this students' perspective, it just makes more sense to return home to a cheaper school where he could receive a similar quality education. MC's parents also had set aside a substantial amount for their daughter to go to college. MC stated, "My parents are giving me $40,000 for four years. So whatever I end up with at the end after giving $40,000" (personal communication, November 13, 2015). Despite having this college fund available, she still had to take out loans. MC added, "And it's kinda expensive to live here. . . . My parents are helping, but I have some loans to get." Although U.S. News College Rankings (2015) recognized UH Mānoa as a best bargain school, finances still served as an instrumental variable influencing student's intentions in this study, particularly when considering the overall cost of college, such as housing, food, books, and additional miscellaneous expenses. The central theme of finances was the critical factor in students' intention to leave UH Mānoa before degree completion.

Closer to Home. The high cost of attending UH Mānoa led to the emergence of four sub-themes. One recurring sub-theme was closer to home. Nonresident students expressed a desire to be closer to family while attending college. This was, in part, because they missed their families, but also because it was considerably cheaper to attend a local college and live at home compared to attending UH Mānoa. For example, AC stated, "When I am talking to my family like I'm video chatting with them like siblings . . . really makes you miss them" (AC, personal communication, November 16, 2015). She continued: "If I am home sick it's not like everybody

else in California and I can just drive home. It's like I have to tough it out and it's helping me like grow up." Although some of the participants felt homesick, AC included, it was not the critical factor in their decision to depart from UH Mānoa. Rather, the overall cost made them seriously reconsider continuing their education at the University for their entire baccalaureate careers. In the case of AC, she received Cal Grants totaling $12,000 whereas she only received $5,000 in grants to attend UH Mānoa. AC explained, "Knowing that I can still get that grant back home and there's a school like twenty or ten minutes from my house. so it's really close. I wouldn't even have to live on campus so it saves me a lot of money" (AC, personal communication, November 16, 2015). The finances coupled with being homesick made AC want to return home to complete her baccalaureate degree.

Similarly, participant JS also cited being closer to home as an important factor influencing his decision to depart from UH Mānoa (personal communication, November 19, 2015). JS's rationale for wanting to be closer to home was to develop business connections. He said he believes he should get a degree where he wants to live later in life, because he will develop important connections throughout the completion of an undergraduate degree. He stated:

> If I'm planning on getting a degree and then moving back to the mainland then I'm not going to have this same connections and people but I did like in Hawai‘i even though like I have that out there like I'm planning on moving back to the mainland at some point in my life. (JS, personal communication, November 19, 2015)

JS said he felt he has a number of friends and family back home who will help advance him economically. He stated, "I have bunch of family, friends that are like would take me under their wing and show me what they do." He elaborated, "And so I feel like I have more connections back home which where I mainly live from the mainland." In addition to developing

connections, JS stated that he does not want to risk going into debt by staying at UH Mānoa. For JS, his parents set aside the amount to cover all four years of college at the university. However, they cannot afford any additional years. JS stated, "My parents like planned out like financially like to get all of us through college so I was lucky and so like I can easily stay it all here four years." He continued:

> Like easily for like I can do it with the help of um my parents and I would not have to take loan out or anything because they have um like money like money aside and everything. So financially I was . . . I'm fine. (JS, personal communication, November 19, 2015)

Despite having enough for four years, JS was not confident he could complete a baccalaureate degree within this timeframe. He stated, "So like it's not that I'm saying that I would um wouldn't finish on time in four years but um it's another factor that are like is kind of scaring me." This lack of confidence, among other things, made him reconsider staying at UH Mānoa for the remainder of his undergraduate degree. He said:

> I've talked to a lot of people who like who aren't, were not as fortunate and like had to do loans and are graduated and like working and everything and like the first like ten fifteen years of their life they're just paying off loans and like I wanna be able to do like excel in life like right after college and like be able to get a house or like an apartment or something or a car and like be able to start life rather than being held back by loans and stuff. (JS, personal communication, November 19, 2015)

From JS's perspective, moving closer to home would enable him to receive a similar education for a fraction of the cost compared to what he is paying at UH Mānoa. Moving closer to home

would also enable him to build invaluable business connections while pursuing his undergraduate degree.

Transportation Issues. Another sub-theme emerged from the findings: transportation issues. The nonresident students underestimated how difficult it is to travel the island without a car. They assumed the beach would be in close proximity to campus. This assumption left some research participants with feelings of ill will towards their living situation. BB stated:

> The biggest thing for me that I was turned off by when I got here for the first couple of weeks that I was here was how difficult it was to get around using the bus and all that like I've done a couple of times that I mean it takes like 20 minutes to get to Waikiki so it's kinda inefficient to get around that way. (BB, personal communication, November 10, 2015)

Similarly, AC felt overwhelmed with issues connected to transportation. At the time of the study, AC worked off-campus to help offset the cost of living in Hawai‘i. Just getting to work posed major challenges, as she had to take multiple bus routes. She stated, "Getting to work really frustrates me because I have to take the bus and the bus is kind of weird here so it's like I don't want to buy a car" (AC, personal communication, November 16, 2015). Even if AC were to buy or lease a car, besides the financial strain, parking while living on campus has its own challenges. UH Mānoa has a limited number of parking stalls for faculty, staff, and students. Parking spots are available on a priority basis, with faculty and staff receiving top priority, undergraduate returning students receiving second priority, and incoming students receiving the lowest priority. The residence halls also offer undergraduate juniors and seniors top priority for parking. Oftentimes, there are no available spots for incoming students. This creates a heightened level of frustration and exacerbates the issues with transportation that incoming students face. IS

considered buying a car while pursuing her undergraduate degree at UH Mānoa; however, she was deterred by parking issues. She expressed her frustrations with the current parking situation when she said, "Oh my God parking, sorry." She elaborated on the issue by saying there is "not enough parking" at UH Mānoa. OJ also cited her frustration with the parking situation at UHM, stating:

> For first year students it's really hard for them to get a parking pass which kinda sucks too and if you are first year student and kinda like you have to have a job on campus and it's like since I'm dorming where will I keep my car without a parking spot, so it's kinda tough. (OJ, personal communication, November 10, 2015)

Due to UH Mānoa being located in the Mānoa Valley, there are no alternate solutions for consistent parking off-campus. If students are unable to secure a parking spot on campus, they have to take the bus, purchase a moped, or rely heavily on taxis or ridesharing apps such as Uber or Lyft. Utilizing a moped for transportation is inherently more dangerous than driving a car (Cerbal & Morales, 2016). As stated by AC, relying on the bus as a primary means of transportation can be challenging. Consistently relying on a taxi or ridesharing app poses a financial strain on students. Fares from UH Mānoa to Ala Moana Beach Park are on average $17 each way or $34 round trip. Car leases for economy vehicles are in the $150–$200 range per month. Therefore, leasing or buying a car would be more practical than any use of a ride-sharing app beyond once a week. These transportation issues caused students to feel frustrated that they are not able to take advantage of the hikes, beaches, snorkeling, and other outdoor activities Hawai‘i has to offer. Hawai‘i's unique geography was an influential recruitment tool for nonresident students.

Uncertain. Another sub-theme that emerged from the findings was students feeling uncertain about what they should do after graduating from college. Students said they feel they should go to college but that they do not quite know what their own long-term career goals were. These feelings applied to selecting a major as well as to deciding whether to maintain enrollment at UH Mānoa. AA reflected on how she originally wanted to be a kinesiology major but became aware of the apparent small job market and occupational field for those with that major. AA stated:

> I'm not really sure. I'm not really sure because I have no clue what I want to do anymore because I'm in Kinesiology but everybody that I've talked to told me that like Kinesiology, there's not much you can do with it and I'm just afraid that after… if I were to graduate with a Degree in Kinesiology that I wouldn't have a career, I would just have a job. I'm not really sure. I'm really confused right now. (AA, personal communication, November 13, 2015)

Additionally, the high cost of attending UH Mānoa caused her to feel uncertain about her decision to attend the university in the first place. AA stated:

> I probably should've thought about it more. Not that this isn't a good school but, I just wanted to get away and I didn't want to stay at home. But looking back it maybe would have been a wiser decision to stay back just because of the price and because I can get the same degree back home. (AA, personal communication, November 13, 2015)

Similarly, the high cost made MC question whether she should stay at UH Mānoa for her entire undergraduate career. MC stated, "It's expensive to live here." At the time of the interview, she was considering transferring to Montana State University. MC believed that her college fund would extend further if she left Hawai'i. She explained, "My parents are giving me $40,000 for

four years. so whatever I end up with at the end after giving 40,000 . . . Yeah it's pretty expensive and I could have a car there at Montana" (personal communication, November 13, 2015). The idea that MC could potentially avoid or significantly limit the amount of loans made her feel uncertain about her future at UH Mānoa.

Poor Facilities. Students' dissatisfaction with the quality of facilities at UH Mānoa surfaced as another sub-theme. The students felt that the insitution's poor-quality facilities were not congruent with the money they were paying. For example, NN noted that the facilities and materials at her high school were much better compared to those at UH Mānoa. She explained that she went to a public high school, which was fully paid for by tax dollars, whereas she was paying a high cost to attend UH Mānoa. NN stated:

> I feel like things are really outdated here. I feel like my high school is free and it was kinda like I had better materials there. Like in high school I have a whiteboard, here I have chalkboard. It's like the whole desk. (NN, personal communication, November 17, 2015)

NN expanded on the issue by saying she felt she was overpaying for her dorm:

> I feel like with the money I'm paying for my dorm I can like get a small apartment for myself and like have a nicer living situation where I don't have to live with a bunch of people or deal with other people's messes and things. So I just feel like I could better spend money somewhere else. (NN, personal communication, November 17, 2015)

AA also felt she overpaid for the dorms on campus, saying, "We pay for first semester and that was like 9,000 and it's just gone. For that small dorm room so I don't know." The students' perceptions of poor facilities align with the current status of the deferred maintenance backlogs

at UH Mānoa. As of fall 2015, the university would need to spend over $300 million to address the deferred maintenance backlogs around the campus.

It's Hawai'i

The second central theme to emerge from the findings was it's Hawai'i. All nonresident research participants cited Hawai'i's unique geography—its beautiful beaches, awe-inspiring hikes, and consistent warm weather—as the main reason for coming to UH Mānoa. Many of the participants made the decision to pursue higher education in Hawai'i long before it was time to research and apply for colleges. For example, BB responded:

> Well I was here in the seventh grade. My first time I went to Hawai'i and I love Hawai'i. I sort of fall in love with the island and pretty much made a decision at that point to come here. And then when I was here in high school never really research that I knew it was an option I only applied two or three schools and I came here last November, a year ago now. Tour the campus and I like it and the campus was fine and I decided to come here. (BB, personal communication, November 10, 2015)

For BB, a family trip to Hawai'i during her youth had a lasting impression. Similarly, CA cited the warm weather as an important factor for making the decision to come to UH Mānoa. CA stated:

> Well I was going to stay in Alaska but then one day I just kinda decided that I want to go to Hawai'i like I mean it's Hawai'i and I just kinda want to check it out and see something new so I thought that like I've been here before. (BB, personal communication, November 17, 2015)

When I asked CA what specifically about Hawai‘i drew her in, she said, “Being from Alaska was the weather . . . it was the location honestly.” Again, Hawai‘i’s unique geography served as a powerful calling for the student.

IS also cited the warm weather as the primary reason for pursuing higher education at UH Mānoa. IS stated:

> I mean I came here on vacation a lot and like my parents we have this weird thing that coming to Hawai‘i makes you healthier. I mean compare to Seattle we don’t get Vitamin D like it’s cloudy and rainy all the time which I love but I felt like a year in the sunshine was like be good for me. (IS, personal communication, November 17, 2015)

In addition to the sunshine, IS said, “There’s beaches and hiking. There’s like things to do outside of school.” Even for students who originated from warmer climates, Hawai‘i’s unique geography served as a powerful enticement for attending UH Mānoa. When I asked JK why he chose UH Mānoa, he continued to eloborate, “I came here when was a kid, I did the snorkeling, every day I want to do the hike and you know waterfalls, things like that” (personal communication, November 16, 2015). He noted that Hawai‘i has similar attributes to his hometown, Miami, Florida:

> Same climate as Miami, not as humid, consistent weather and will just rain for 20 minutes and goes away. . . . The city in Honolulu is just like Miami. It doesn’t need college just to survive because there’s always something to do. (JK, personal communication, November 16, 2015)

The unique geography of Hawai‘i drew students to the University. For some students, family vacations during their youth made a lasting impression, while others were captivated by the idea of consistent warm weather. All research participants had a positive conceptual vision of Hawai‘i

and attendance at UH Mānoa as warm weather, beaches, and hikes. Unfortunately for some research participants, their expectations did not match their lived experiences.

Different Perception. The sub-theme that emerged from the central theme it's Hawai'i, then, was different perception. Some research participants stated that their expectations of the undergraduate experience at UH Mānoa were not met. For example, AC had visualized her experience at UH Mānoa as consisting of regular outdoor activities such as snorkeling, visiting the beach, and hiking. Instead, she had difficulties managing her academic and leisurely activities as well as difficulty securing transportation to and from desired locations. AC explained:

> When you're here like vacation, it's kind a like I don't know if you don't have to really worry about anything but once you are a student here it's like you have to pay for a certain things like everything is kinda like budget and stuff. I don't know you don't have to rental on car or anything like. It's like finding a means for everything, I guess. (AC, personal communication, November 16, 2015)

She elaborated:

> Now I don't have like as much free times to like do activities what I would do if I was vacationing but I'm kinda busy all the time in school and stuff. So currently I don't have time to go like hiking or at the beach like every day. (AC, personal communication, November 16, 2015)

AC was not the only participant with unmet expectations. BB also had different expectations compared to what actually transpired. BB stated, "I had sort of like expectation of what Hawai'i is going to be like and It didn't really match up" (personal communication, November 10, 2015). As mentioned in the transportation issues section, BB had a really difficult time with

transportation. He had hoped to take advantage of beaches, hikes, and all that Hawai‘i ’s unique geography had to offer.

Magic Wand

Midway through interviewing the nonresident students, I asked students, “if I had a magic wand, what would make them stay at UHM.” A theme that emerged across the nonresident research participants was the notion that better financial aid or some form of scholarship would have been instrumental in their intention to stay. For example, AC stated “I guess what would make me stay probably be like maybe cheaper or like if my financial aid would have been better” (personal communication, November 10, 2015). Similarly, when asked the magic wand question CA replied, “just the cost” (personal communication, November 17, 2017). CA articulated that the high cost was driving her decision to leave. A scholarship would help cover the cost and allow students to focus on academics rather than finances. Students felt the burden even though they were taking out loans. When referencing the cost factor, NN stated “It’s a huge, huge, huge stress” (personal communication, November 17, 2015). Students cited having some form of free financial aid via scholarship or grant would serve as major stress relief and help them stay at UH Mānoa.

Within-case Analysis: Residents

Overview

Four central themes and three sub-themes emerged, all of which relate to students’ reasons for indicating that they plan to transfer prior to the first day of coursework. The four themes are: greater opportunity, finances, family. The three subthemes are: positive experience and on-campus job, faculty connection, and social support, respectively. There was an apparent relationship among the central themes, which ultimately guided students’ intentions and

decision-making. Figure 5 illustrates this interaction as well as the interactions between the central themes and sub-themes. I discuss the connections between the four central themes and sub-themes in the ensuing paragraphs.

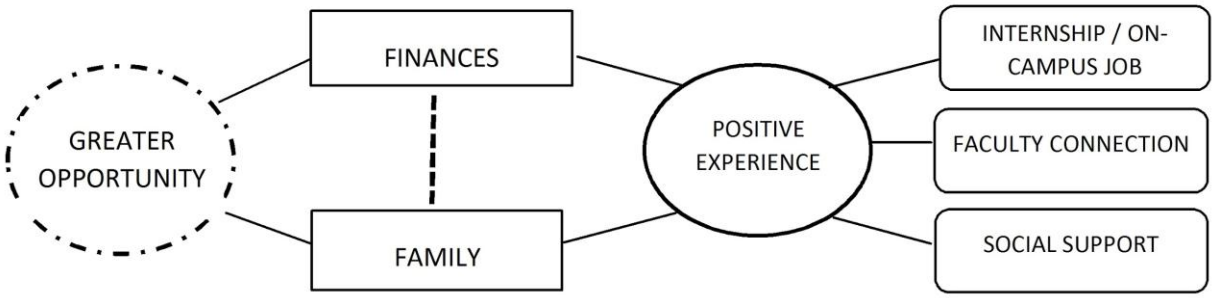


Figure 5. Process and interaction guiding students' intention and subsequent decision to depart.

Greater Opportunity

All resident participants stated that they planned to transfer to another institution in order to seek a greater opportunity for their desired careers. Students perceived UH Mānoa to be limited with regard to the number of: faculty, program size, internships that complement academic coursework, post-degree professional connections, and number of available jobs upon gradation. Although the specifics sought varied for each participant, all participants held the perception that "mainland" colleges, institutions in the continental United States, offered greater opportunities. For example, when I asked NJ if he intended to graduate from UH Mānoa, he immediately said:

> Ideally no simply because I'm a Theater Major and that normally if I intend to do a career in theater or the performing arts then it would be more beneficial for me to transfer to somewhere that has a . . . that is a conservatory or a conservatory like program. It's just

> for what I feel like would benefit me in that career choice. (NJ, personal communication, November 9, 2015)

NJ continues to elaborate further:

> It's just location and the program itself, the department it doesn't have strong resources. All we have is the theater and we're forced to use the theater classrooms, office spaces, rehearsal spaces, and that's not designed for that. You can really tell that you take classes there but it's… I can say that it's a little unfunded… In the performing arts where you go to school can make the difference and what you want to do. (NJ, personal communication, November 9, 2015)

Ultimately, NJ believed that a student's choice of college affects the likelihood of success in a performing arts career.

Similarly, DN also desired to transfer to a more well-known college that better serves his major, computer science. When I asked DN whether he intended to graduate from UH Mānoa, he stated:

> Preferably I would not like to complete my bachelor's at Mānoa. On the basis that in terms of Computer Science I don't see Mānoa has a strong institution for that field; As compared to like a mainland college like specifically University of California where California is basically central hub for everything technology. (DN, personal communication, November 6, 2015)

DN elaborated:

> Well I mean Mānoa was kinda in the middle of nowhere so in terms of creating connections it's significantly harder than if you say went to some school close to Silicon Valley like, I don't know. Just for example I stand for whether basically in the middle of Silicon Valley. (DN, personal communication, November 6, 2015)

In addition to having a more reputable program, the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) also offered internships in the field. DN noted, "UC San Diego has one of the strongest Computer Science programs in the nation. But most importantly they are very well known for having a strong internship program." DN felt that he would not have the same professional success with a computer science degree from UH Mānoa compared to one from UCSD.

While DN, NJ, and others felt there was a greater chance for professional success with a degree from the continental United States, CC and AE felt they were getting pushed out of Hawai‘i because of the competitive nursing program along with a saturated market of nurses on the island of O‘ahu, where UH Mānoa is located. CC explained:

> No I'm not anticipating getting a degree from Mānoa at all because like I said I want to transfer because it's not against Mānoa but it's just my goal and I want to major in nursing. The difficult thing about Mānoa—not the school—it's the combination of both the state and school. In Mānoa, I actually like the nursing program of Mānoa; it's that it's pretty small. The problem in the nursing school here is like so massive and I consider it and I'm thinking that my chances of getting into nursing school is probably very slim. (CC, personal communication, November 6, 2015)

CC recognized that employment opportunities in Hawai‘i are limited. She stated that “the job outlook here in nursing is kinda . . . it’s bad. Nursing is an in-demand job like everywhere” (personal communication, November 6, 2015). CC added, “I’m trying the best that I can like to stay in O‘ahu because I really like Hawai‘i. It’s just the condition here like kinda forcing me out” (personal communication, November 6, 2015). Similarly, AE felt overwhelmed by the competitiveness of the nursing program at UH Mānoa: “I felt like here nursing is competitive so I go and try another school” (personal communication, November 18, 2015). The competitive program with a dismal job outlook made CC and AE want to transfer to the continental United States for better career opportunities.

Why Students Attended UH Mānoa

The purpose of the study was to seek to understand “Why do first-time degree seeking students at a large public research university indicate they plan to leave (stop-out or dropout) prior to the start of classes?” Analysis of the collected data revealed that resident students’ primary reason for indicating a desire to transfer prior to the start of classes was the perception of greater opportunities on the continental United States. In addition, the analysis revealed factors that influenced students’ decision to stay after the first year. Although this data extends beyond the original research question, it adds to the existing literature on first-year student retention. Furthermore, the theme and sub-themes affecting students’ decision to stay beyond the first year were too prevalent throughout the coding and analysis not to report.

Despite the students’ desire to attend a college on the continental United States, they pursued higher education at UH Mānoa for the first year. Finances and family served as the primary reasons why students decided to stay in Hawai‘i. Resident students recognized that attending an institution on the continental United States would result in too much of a financial

burden for themselves and their families. Students did not want to amass large amounts of debt to pay for the cost of attending out-of-state colleges. In addition to the issue of finances, resident students felt a deep sense of commitment to their families and a desire to be close to them. Both finances and commitment to family ultimately led students to attend UH Mānoa rather than pursue their ambitions for greater opportunity on the continental United States. Furthermore, there was an relationship between the finances and family themes. The following paragraphs share the students' voices and highlight the connection between these two themes.

Finances

Finances served as a central theme influencing resident students' decision to attend UH Mānoa rather than an institution on the continental United States. When I asked DH why he decided to attend UH Mānoa, he replied, "Honestly for finance. . . UH Mānoa is actually a lot cheaper than those mainland university. The first university I looked at mainland was about $50,000 and Mānoa was I don't know average is $30,000" (DH, personal communication, November 9, 2015). MD also highlighted this financial comparison, explaining that UH Mānoa is "cheaper than going to the mainland." Additionally, MD stated, "Money can also determine whether or not I go [to a mainland school]" (personal communication, November 12, 2015). CT also cited the high cost of attending an institution on the continental United States as the primary reason for attending UH Mānoa:

> I thought it would be good to kind a start off at home and then get a feel of college life and then kinda complete basics here, for the price too. If I went to Chapman right away I think I would go to have to pay $45,000 [per year]. Yeah and then I'll be here I think $8,000. So I didn't have to take loans if I came here and then Chapman I would have been in debt. (CT, personal communication, November 12, 2015)

DN also noted the high cost of attending an institution on the continental United States as the primary factor guiding his decision to stay at UH Mānoa. When I asked DN why he chose to attend UH Mānoa, he said,

> Strictly cost. . . . I'm here on scholarships so my tuition is free but at UC San Diego the overall cost because I'm out of state was $60,000 so that was a heavy influence on where I want to go. Sixty thousand dollars a year times four is $240,000. (DN, personal communication, November 6, 2015)

Although students perceived that there were greater opportunities available to them by attending an institution on the continental United States, the benefits did not outweigh the costs. With the case of DN, he would have needed to take out over $240,000 in loans to fund his education. AE also acknowledged that the high cost of attending an institution on the continental United States was a reason for staying in Hawai‘i (personal communication, November 18, 2015).

Family

Students' family members also influenced their decision to attend UH Mānoa. When I asked MN whether UH Mānoa was her first choice, she replied:

> It wasn't actually. I think it was about my first choice for a local school but I was originally planning to go out and I did apply to several schools on the mainland—Berkeley and New York University—and that didn't really worked out. And then I made a compromise with my parents because I think most of that parents' attachment thing that they don't really want their child go. (MN, personal communication, December 1, 2015)

She proceeded to explain how it is important in her culture for the family unit to remain together, even as the children become adults:

> So the compromise was that I'd stay here. That I wouldn't go to the mainland school. When we talk about college with my parents I guess . . . my dad is Japanese and my mom is Filipino so people like those stereotypes together, those typical cultural differences. Main point is they don't want you to go. They want the whole family to stay together and so it was kinda conflict between them and me go to . . . because they know that my high school accomplishments could have gotten me easily to a mainland school versus you know having the whole family stay here. (MN, personal communication, December 1, 2015)

Family also played a significant role for KJ. When I asked KJ to explain why she decided to attend UH Mānoa, she stated:

> My brother went to school here and so the whole family decides to move out here because I want to come school here too. . . . I think my brother is a big influence because he said he really like the campus and everything. . . . I just chose the campus because it's a campus where my brother went to. Other than the beach and I know that there's a campus out there who out close to but I figure that easier just go the same campus with my brother. (KJ, personal communication, November 18, 2015)

KJ's entire family moved from the continental United States to Hawai‘i when her brother began attending UH Mānoa two years prior. With KJ, her commitment to family served as a primary factor influencing her decision to attend UH Mānoa.

Interaction between Family and Finances. For some students, family and finances were interdependent factors influencing the decision to attend UH Mānoa. Students relied heavily on their parents to help them fund their higher education. In the case of BD, he really

wanted to pursue a degree from Colorado State University. However, his parents talked to him about the financial burden it would place on the family to send him to an out-of-state college. BD recalled:

> So like what I said in the beginning finances actually played a big role because it's between UH Mānoa and Colorado [State]. So I was actually really leaning toward Colorado when my parents actually sat me down and they told me about the financial side and how much it would cost so being that [I] actually understood why and then I was looking at the same experience but staying home and actually saving a lot of money. (BD, personal communication, November 9, 2015)

With BD, his parents had to inform him that the financial burden of attending an out-of-state institution was just too costly.

While BD's parents had a family conversation to candidly explain the financial picture, MN herself understood the burden that attending an out-of-state college would place on her family without a family talk: "I didn't want to depend on my family to pay for everything. And so financially I had to consider the cost in the long run. How much . . . because financially it's going to put a strain on your family somehow, some way." Elaborating on how finances affected her decision, MN said she felt that if the money had been available, she would have left despite the strong connection to family. She explained:

> I felt that as much as the attachment problem is if those mainland schools [had been] a lot cheaper then my family would have said you know yes because the cheaper one is . . . you know go for it but again I think it really limited the possibilities of what we could do

> with higher education. I feel that if we didn't have to worry about the finances. (MN, personal communication, December 1, 2015)

DH also did not want to place a burden on his parents. DH remarked:

> I did it for my parents. . . . I really want to break the whole like the stress load on them because I already came from the private school and that's already more expensive in here so that's why I want to go here. Well actually it's really part of my big decision honestly. (DH, personal communication, November 9, 2015)

Both the commitment to family and finances were central themes influencing students' decision to attend a college without the intention of graduating. These themes were not independent of each other; rather, there was an apparent interaction. The commitment students felt toward their families was apparent through their desire to not place their families under major financial strain. It was also apparent through their expressed desire to have moral support and not leave their parents by attending an out of state institution.

Positive Experience

The interviews for the research study took place around the thirteenth week of the first semester for the student participants. This timeframe enabled students to take part in some of the experiences and opportunities that UH Mānoa provides. As a result, most of the resident research participants indicated that they had a positive experience at UH Mānoa and, in turn, were seriously considering staying there for the duration of their college careers. "Positive experience" emerged as a consistent theme across the resident student responses. From this theme emerged three sub-themes that resulted in a positive experience and ultimately influenced students' decision to stay beyond the first year. The sub-themes on-campus job, faculty connection, and

social support all led to resident students having a positive experience. Below, I share the students' voices regarding how their experiences at UH Mānoa have changed their decision to stay beyond the first year.

DH initially wanted to attend college in California and intended to transfer after her first year. However, she had a positive experience overall during her first semester, which made her reconsider leaving UH Mānoa. When I asked DH whether she would leave after the end of her first year, she replied:

> Honestly I think I might just stay here four years. It took some time to think about it but I thought about [it] for a while also because of finances but also like my experience so far is awesome here at UH is why I am staying. (DH, personal communication, November 9, 2015)

Finances still served as a key factor in DH's decision; however, her experience has led her to realize UH Mānoa has a lot to offer her. DH was not the only student who highlighted having a positive experience at UH Mānoa as reason for deciding to stay beyond the first year. Students' positive experiences included having an on-campus job or internship, a faculty connection, and social support.

On-Campus Job

On-campus jobs opportunities also had an influential impact on students' decision to stay beyond the first year. With BD, he found an on-campus job at the start of his academic career with UH Mānoa:

> So I was still planning on it like I go here for year to and then leave. And so that was all my thing and then after the time being here, I really just said I don't want to leave because it's basically home. I feel comfortable and I really got myself involved in the

> campus and the university itself. So I have a job with the Work Recreation Center. (BD, personal communication, November 9, 2015)

BD initially wanted to go to Colorado State University; however, after having gotten involved with and gaining work experience through the University's Warrior Recreation Center, he realized UH Mānoa could offer him countless opportunities for academic, social, career, and personal growth.

Faculty Connection

Students cited positive experiences with faculty as having improved their overall satisfaction with and perception of the university. When I asked DN about his experience at UH Mānoa thus far, he replied:

> I originally was going to transfer after first year but sometimes I think you know I can stick for two years but then it would also mean that less time I spend in California to gain residency. At the same time . . . it's not like I think Mānoa is like a terrible school. I mean my Computer Science professor is probably one of the cool guys that I met in my life in his lab and what he does in research. I find him extremely interesting. (DN, personal communication, November 6, 2015)

Initially, MN thought Mānoa had seemingly little to offer him with his major, computer science. However, after developing a strong connection with his faculty, he reconsidered his initial perception of UH Mānoa. Similarly, NJ initially saw UH Mānoa as having minimal to offer with regard to his desired profession in the performing arts. However, NJ cited his experience at UH Mānoa as having made him reconsider his initial intention to leave. NJ stated:

> Actually I really like the arts program at UH. It's a wonderful community, wonderful program. The thing about UH is that as the students come out are always good and the professors are fantastic. . . . I become very familiar and very comfortable with all of the professors. (NJ, personal communication, November 9, 2015)

Students' relationships with faculty led them to challenge their original perception that attending an institution on continental United States would provide better experiences and opportunities.

Social Support

Social support also played an influential role in students' decision to stay beyond the first year. DH was moved by the various people from across the world she had met while at UHM and on Oahu, and she took it upon herself to share her knowledge and history of the island with them. She appreciated the campus's diversity, as it allowed her to see other places in the world through her relationships with peers. DH stated:

> UH is a very diverse college already. It's also cool meeting all new people and seeing their cultures. They kinda bring a little bit of their culture here so that's why I also want to stay here because I'm like . . . it doesn't really matter where you go. You're going to meet many different people from many different places. (DH, personal communication, November 9, 2015)

She continued, saying:

> I got more than some people that just move to. They wanted know what Hawai'i is about. They want to know what the culture is. What kind of food I should go to places? I should venture like. . . . I think it's cool and share that with them from my own experiences. It's also why I want to stay. (DH, personal communication, November 9, 2015)

BD also cited developing strong social support as a reason for not wanting to leave. BD stated:

> The ACE program, was perfect because like I actually have like a good five, if not all friends that I just talk to in class and so we all walk to class together, we all actually walk to like actually classes together. We actually have group message and we text each other like, oh so what's going on there? (BD, personal communication, November 9, 2015)

Additionally, BD listed other involvement activities:

> So I have my job there and I also with the Club SHRM so Society of Human Resource Management and so since I'm like so involved with the community and like the university aspect I don't want to leave and just like put that all away. (BD, personal communication, November 9, 2015)

BD's connections to the campus community changed his original intention to leave UH Mānoa.

Summary

In summary, the within-case analysis for resident students resulted in four central themes: greater opportunity, finances, family, and positive experience. These central themes interacted with each other. The first theme, greater opportunity, served as the primary answer to why first-time degree-seeking students at a large public research university indicate that they plan to leave (stop-out or dropout) prior to the start of classes. As this qualitative analysis has shown, students' decisions to attend UH Mānoa with the intention of transferring were a result of their financial situation and commitment to family, and their intentions to leave were a result of their perception of greater career and academic opportunities at institutions on the continental United States. The central themes of finances and family were not independent; rather, there was a clear interaction between the two themes. By the 13th week of classes, some students had changed their minds and planned to finish their college careers at UH Mānoa. Their decision to attend UH Mānoa

beyond the first year was a result of having had a positive experience, namely, through an on-campus job, the development of faculty connections, and the building of strong social support through UH Mānoa. The following section will provide a cross-case analysis between the resident and nonresident research participants.

Cross-case Analysis: Nonresident and Resident Students

Overview

In the following paragraphs, I explore the similarities and differences between the two research populations through a cross-case analysis and close with overall reactions.

Similarities

Finances. Finances emerged as a central theme across both research participant groups. In fact, both populations' financial situations served as the main factor for the decision to remain or dropout from UH Mānoa. For nonresident students, the cost of college, including room and board, was approximately $40,000 per year (University of Hawai‘i, 2015). Over four years, then, the total for a baccalaureate degree was $160,000 for nonresidents. During interviews, students often said that they expect to take longer than four years to complete a degree. For each additional year, students pay not only tuition, room, and book fees, but also opportunity costs due to delayed graduation and career attainment. Nonresident students cited a desire to avoid massive amounts of student loan debt as the primary reason for leaving. They realized after arriving on campus that they could go back to a local community or four-year college in their hometown and receive a quality education without taking on so much debt.

Finances also served as a primary factor for resident students' decision to attend UH Mānoa. Resident students recognized that the cost to attend an institution on the continental

United States would be at minimum four times the cost per year to attend UH Mānoa when accounting for room and board. The national average for out-of-state tuition, room and board, and books is approximately $40,000 at four-year public colleges (College Board, 2015). Resident students sought to avoid burdening themselves and their families with significant amounts of debt. Both groups initially planned a short stay at UHM to avoid incurring large debt.

Family. Being closer to family is another point of comparison between the two groups of students. For nonresident students, it did not occur to them how much they would miss their families until they had arrived in Hawai‘i. Nonresident students expressed feelings of homesickness and a desire to be closer to family. Comparatively, commitment to family served as a central theme for resident students. Similar to their nonresident counterparts, they expressed a desire to be close to their families while pursuing their undergraduate degrees. Both residents and nonresidents cited their families as a primary form of social support. It is important to note some differences within these similarities. Resident students stressed the notion that they did not want to cause financial burden on their parents as a key reason for attending UH Mānoa, whereas this notion was not apparent among nonresident students. Furthermore, culture was an important role for resident students; they explained that part of their values and cultural expectations was to stay together as a family unit. This commitment to family based on cultural expectations was not visible through the nonresident coding and analysis. Despite these differences, both resident and nonresident students cited being close to family as an important factor influencing their decision.

Contrasts

Greater Opportunity. There were clear contrasts in the data between the resident and nonresident groups. The most obvious contrast was with the resident theme “greater opportunity.” Resident students expressed a desire to attend college on the continental United

States for greater academic and career opportunity. There was an underlying perception prevalent among all the resident students that UH Mānoa did not have enough to offer them. Conversely, nonresident students did not mention the desire to seek greater opportunity. Quite the opposite, some nonresident students cited the quality of the undergraduate programs at UH Mānoa as a primary factor in their decision to attend. Specifically, students viewed the Shidler College of Business and the College of Natural Sciences' Biology Department as strong academic programs during the college selection process. There was a clear disconnect between resident and nonresident students' perceptions regarding the quality of education and opportunities that UH Mānoa had to offer: while nonresident students perceived UH Mānoa as having a high degree of academic opportunities available, resident students perceived it as being limited in its opportunities.

Positive Experience. Positive experiences appeared to have a strong influence on resident students' decision to re-enroll after their first year. By contrast, nonresidents as a whole had highly positive feelings toward the university and their overall undergraduate experience. However, their positive experience was not enough to sway their decision to leave. For nonresident students, the cost of attending UH Mānoa far outweighed the value of their undergraduate experience. The financial strain they faced led them to leave despite having positive feelings toward the institution.

Overall Reaction to the Cross-Case Analysis

Overall, there was a balance between the similarities and differences of themes for both research populations. The large role finances played in students' decision to attend and depart from UH Mānoa was not surprising. The cost of higher education has been on the rise over the past 20 years. Since the financial crisis of 2008, tuition has climbed over ten times the consumer

price index (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). See Figure 6 for a comparison of cost increases between industries. Despite the economic recovery, public two- and four-year colleges have not seen the same type of recovery in their budgets from state governments. This has generally caused institutions of higher education to raise the cost of attendance through tuition. The historical timeline of events is in alignment with students' decision for selecting colleges. Resident students are staying home, while nonresidents are realizing that they cannot afford all four years of college attendance at UH Mānoa.

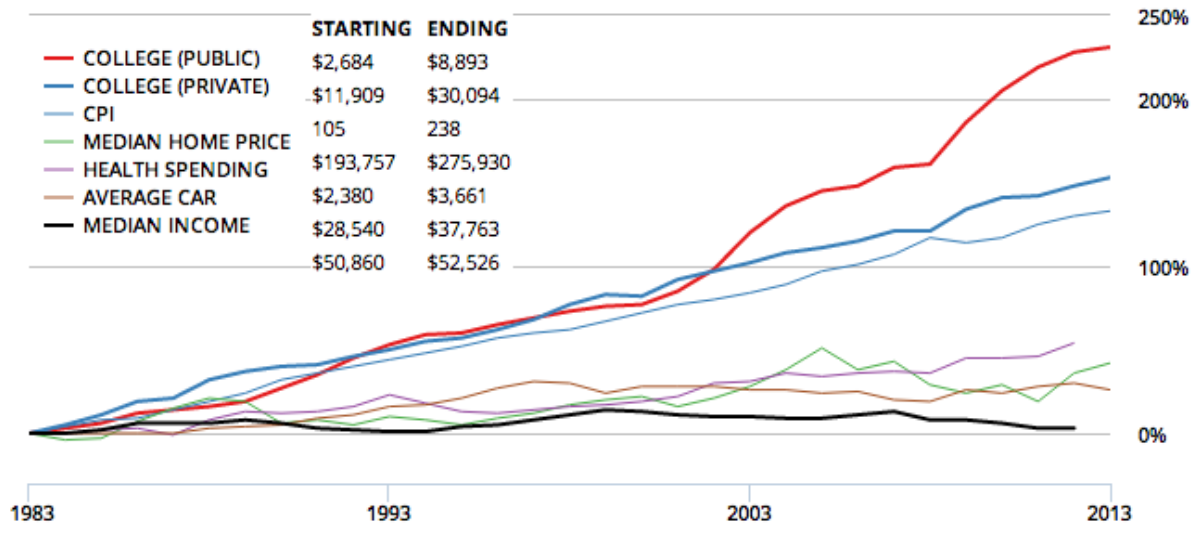


Figure 6. Graph tracks the rise in tuition compared to other consumer goods over the past 30 years (Source: Collegeboard.org, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Census)

Applying Bean's Nine Themes

Bean's (2005) nine themes provided a framework to better understand the data and themes yielded from interviews with research participants. After careful consideration of the categories and themes, I applied Bean's nine themes to help further strengthen the analysis of the

data. Bean's nine themes are: intentions, institutional fit and commitment, psychological processes and key attitudes, interaction with the institution and the external environment, academics, social factors, bureaucratic factors, the external environment, the student's background, money and finance. I discuss the themes of intentions, money and finance, institutional fit and commitment, social factors, and bureaucratic factors in the ensuing paragraphs as they are pertinent to the findings. The themes found in this study have a degree of allignment with previous research on the issue of first-year student retention as well as points of contention, and added new understandings.

Intentions

Bean (2005) argued that intentions to behave in a certain manner precede that behavior. According to his research the "intention to leave variable was the best predictor of actual student departure from college. In empirical studies, after controlling statistically for intent, it was rare that other variables were significantly related to leaving" (Bean, 2005, p. 218). Bean also noted that the variable is an empty variable because it does not explain why students intend to leave (Bean, 2005). I selected students for this study based upon their indicated educational objectives. Specifically, I contacted students who indicated a plan to transfer, stop-out, or dropout. The findings I have described in this chapter help explain the intention issue for the UHM resident students. The construct, greater opportunity, served as a central theme in the findings. Resident students intended to leave in order to seek greater opportunities on the continental United States. It is important to note that the majority of students who indicated that they were going to transfer, stop-out, or dropout actually did so the second year. This was true for both resident and nonresident students.

Money and Finance

Bean (2005) noted that money and students' financial situation are critical to institutional retention rates, and he highlights the delicate balance that institutions must have between securing funds from state governments and supplementing the costs with tuition. When state-funded dollars decrease, tuition increases. Bean argued that institutions should distribute funds to students from low-income families to help improve retention (2005). Bean's research had some overlap with the findings from this study, as well as points of contention. The findings from this study do support the importance of finances in relation to student retention. Both resident and nonresident students cited finances as ultimately influencing their decision to stop-out, dropout, or transfer. The findings from this study demonstrate that finances affect retention not only for low-income students, but also for students from more wealthy backgrounds. Specifically, some nonresident students had over $100,000 in their college funds. Despite these relatively abundant funds, they still decided to leave because they felt their money could go further at an institution in their home states. The findings bring to question the notion that institutional aid is best suited for students from low-income backgrounds.

Institutional Fit and Commitment

Bean (2005) identified a key attitude that affects students' decisions to depart: their sense of commitment, or loyalty, to the institution. He noted that administrators and student affairs professionals should be focused on providing services, and place emphases on delivering the services in a manner that leads students to have a positive perception of the college and their educational experience (Bean, 2005). Resident students had little to no long-term commitment to the institution upon entering. However, having positive experiences during the first semester led them to develop stronger attitudes of commitment to UH Mānoa. Many nonresident research

participants had strong feelings of loyalty to the institution. The nonresident students expressed a desire to continue their education; however, the cost of attending UH Mānoa outweighed their commitment to the institution.

Social Factors

Bean (2005) argued that social relationships serve as a critical factor in students' decision to transfer- stop- and dropout. Social factors are defined by developing quality relationships through peers, faculty, and staff. Social factors did have a powerful role for resident students. One of the central themes for students was positive experience. A students' positive experience was linked to faculty connections and developing peer social support. For resident students, the development of social support and faculty connections persuaded them to continue their education at UH Mānoa.

Bureaucratic Factors

Bean (2005) stated that bureaucratic factors refer to the interaction between the students and the services of the institution. Negative interactions result in students feeling disheartened by the institution. Transportation issues emerged as a sub-theme for nonresident students. Specifically, nonresident students had difficulty securing parking spots, and expressed high levels of frustration over the issue. This inability to park on campus meant students did not have reliable transportation to travel around the island, and it left them feeling disheartened with UH Mānoa and as if the school had inhibited their positive college experience.

The findings from this inquiry support Bean's (2005) themes for explaining student retention. I argue that the role finances play in a student's decision to depart is larger than previously thought (Bean, 2005; Tinto 1975, 1993, 2012). Much of the literature on student retention stresses involvement in the campus community along with social and academic

integration (Bean, 2005; Astin, 1999; Tinto 1975, 1993, 2012). These notions have dominated the field of student retention for the past 30 years. While these themes of involvement and social integration are still prevalent, this study highlights how finances have moved into the forefront of student retention and graduation discussions. This is a result of the great recession of 2008 and subsequent defunding of public higher education by the government. Public institutions of higher education have had to offset major cuts by turning to another revenue source, hence the dramatic rise in the cost of attending college.

Bean's (2005) themes of psychological process and key attitudes, interaction with the institution and external environment, academics, and student's background did not align with the findings. As highlighted through Table 6 and Table 7 with regard to student demographics, most participants had above average high school GPAs and first semester GPAs. The academic ability of the research participants did not seem to sway their intention to leave or stay. Furthermore, finances affected students from various socioeconomic backgrounds. The findings from the study offer a point of contention for Bean's (2005) themes of academics and students' background. Whereas, the findings from this study did not align nor contend with Bean's (2005) themes of interaction with the institution and external environment and psychological process and key attitudes, rather, the findings did not fit with the framework.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed key findings from a study of first-year student intentionality and related impacts on retention. I aligned the data collection and analysis with the central research question of the study. There was one central theme for nonresidents, finances, which was interconnected with four sub-themes, closer to home, transportation issues, uncertain, and poor facilities. There were four central themes for resident students: greater opportunity, family,

finances, and positive experience. The positive experience theme was interconnected with three sub-themes: on-campus job, faculty connection, and social support. The case study site was UH Mānoa.

I utilized Cresswell's (2007) and Saldana's (2013) methods for coding and analyzing the data. I completed a within-case analysis for both research populations, resident and nonresident. Following completion of the within-case analysis, I completed a cross-case analysis between the two research groups. In the cross-case analysis, I compared and contrasted the findings from the two research populations. Similarities and differences were both apparent. I completed the analysis of the data by applying Bean's (2005) nine themes to further understand how intentionality affects first-year college student retention. In the closing chapter, I offer discussions, implications, and conclusions based on the findings.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Implications and Conclusion

Overview

In this study I have presented empirical data on why students attend a public four-year university without the intention of graduating from this initial institution of higher education. The goal has been to develop an understanding of the intentionality of residents and nonresidents students in the pursuit of their academic goals at a large public research university. The study sheds light on the driving forces that lead students to attend a university without the intention of graduating. In the following paragraphs, I discuss key findings from this research; implications for theory, practice, and future research; limitations to the findings; and finally, concluding thoughts.

Summary of the Results

All data collected for this study resulted from the driving research question: Why do first-time degree-seeking students at a large public research university indicate that they plan to transfer or dropout prior to the start of classes? Results from this study demonstrate that the high cost of college attendance has a major impact on students' intentions and subsequent decision to stay or depart. There were similarities and differences across the two populations interviewed for the study, residents and nonresidents.

Resident students cited a strong desire to leave prior to enrolling. They attended UH Mānoa instead of a college in the continental United States because of their financial situation. Resident students initially sought to attend a college in the continental United States for to ensure greater employment opportunities after college, as well as for the "mainland experience." Most participants shared the belief that mainland colleges are for some reason better than UH Mānoa, despite similar national rankings between the institutions in question? However, a positive

experience led resident students to continue their education at UH Mānoa. Additionally, residents did not want to assume the financial burden on themselves or their families of taking on large amounts of debt to pay for higher education.

The overall cost of attending UH Mānoa for nonresidents was the central issue behind their intention to leave. As part of federal reporting, UH Mānoa is required to ask students their educational goals, and it does so shortly after students register and are prompted to make a payment for tuition and fees. During interviews, nonresidents expressed that their overall experience with UH M was positive. They cited having made new friends and enjoying all that the University has to offer. After the initial interviews, I asked participants whether there was anything UH Mānoa could do to change their intentions. Students repeatedly stated that making the costs lower would help them persist; however, they were realistic about the low likelihood of receiving substantial funding through scholarships.

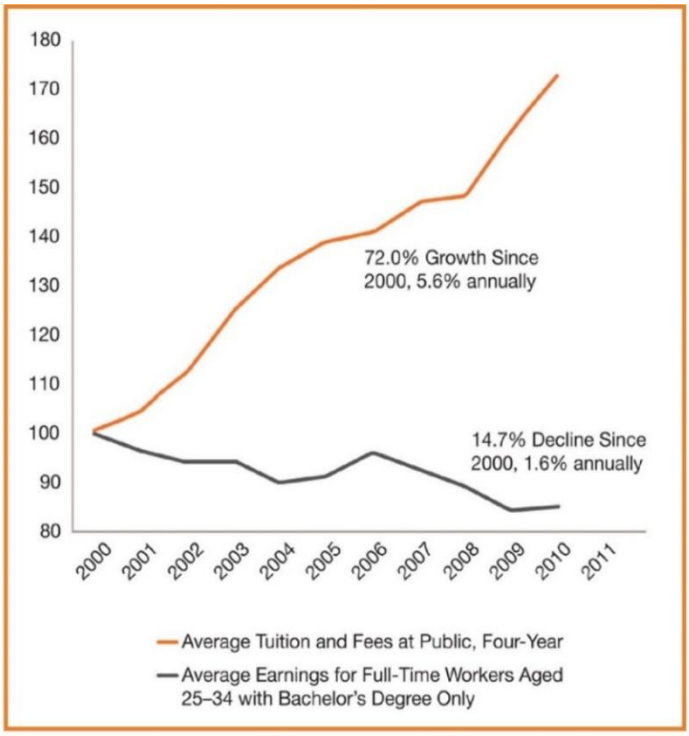
The primary similarity across participant groups was how costs affected intentionality and subsequent decision-making. The primary difference was the outcome: residents chose to stay at UH Mānoa to save money, while nonresidents chose to leave the University chose to leave for the same reason?

Discussion

The findings from the study align with other scholarly articles on student departure and intentionality. Tinto (1975, 1993, 2012) and Astin (1985, 1999) have argued that students' perceptions regarding sense of belonging on campus and their ability to form relationships are influential for their decision to stay, and the findings from this study support this notion,

particularly for the resident students. Resident students cited having a positive experience and forming connections as major factors in their decision to persist at UH Mānoa.

This study also adds to the large body of research on student departure. Specifically, it highlights how much student finances play a role in the decision to depart. Much of the original research on student attrition started with Tinto's (1975) article examining student departure as a social phenomenon between the student and the institution. Although Tinto (1975, 1993, 2012) has made modifications to his original model, the key elements of his theory on student departure have remained the same over the years. Specifically, Tinto (1975, 1993, 2012) has argued that student the decision to depart is a longitudinal process dependent on the students' ability to integrate with the campus community. However, this study begins to shed light on how the dramatic rise in tuition and cost of college attendance negatively influences student retention. Figure 7 tracks the rise in tuition compared to the average earnings of college graduates.



Source: College Board, U.S. Department of Education, Census Bureau, and Citi Research.
Tuition and earnings were weighted in 2010 dollars; tuition and fees were enrolment-weighted.

Figure 7. Tuition Growth Compared to College Graduates Earnings

Over the past twenty years, the cost of higher education has risen by nearly four times the consumer price index (Denneen & Dretler, 2012). The consumer price index "is a measure of the average change over time in the prices paid by urban consumers for a market basket of consumer goods and services" (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). The consumer price index is considered to be by economists the best measure of inflation (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). To offer perspective, this figure is double the rate at which the housing market climbed prior to the 2008 crash. Even more alarming, the cost of higher education is expected to increase by six times the consumer price index by the year 2030 (Denneen & Dretler, 2012). If one were to translate this into dollars, the average cost to attend public four-year colleges in 2015 was approximately $21,447 per year (College Board, 2015). This estimate includes tuition, room and board, books

and supplies, transportation, and other expenses. Accounting for a 10% rise in cost of college attendance over the next 15 years, the estimated cost would be $89,589 per year (College Board, 2015). The total estimated cost for four years would be approximately $415,785 (College Board, 2015).

Historically, colleges and universities served as the primary means for individuals to advance themselves economically (Denneen & Dretler, 2012). As technology progresses and eliminates blue-collar jobs through automation, the need for an educated workforce becomes critical (Lock, 2004). Yet, the dramatic rise in college will make it difficult for students from middle to low socioeconomic backgrounds to obtain a degree. The projected rise in the cost of college attendance would make obtaining a four-year degree economically unviable. Additionally, the debt students would need to incur would outweigh the economic benefits of having a degree.

Limitations

This study has some notable limitations. The qualitative nature of the research requires caution when generalizing findings across other institutions and students outside of UH Mānoa. The primary finding was the notion that the overall cost of college—including tuition, room and board, books, and so on—is a driving force behind students' intentions. It is important to note that Hawai‘i is one of the most expensive places to live in the world (Forbes, 2016). This high cost of living has an impact on the overall cost of college attendance for students. Despite these notable limitations, however, implications do exist.

Implications

Implications for Theory

Theory serves as a vital tool for higher education professionals because it provides a framework for working with students (Evans, Forney, Guido, & Patton, 2009). Theory puts students' challenges and developmental milestones in context and gives professionals a point of reference for guiding students (McDade, 1999). The data and analysis from this study offer some implications for theories on student departure.

Bean's (2005) nine themes of student departure served as the primary theoretical model for analyzing the data in this study. However, it was not the only theory on student departure that shaped this study. Tinto (1975, 1999) and Astin (1999) have made significant contributions to the knowledge base on student departure, and Bean's (2005) themes are centered on some of their original work. Therefore, I include an analysis of all three authors' work in my discussion about implications for theory on student departure.

The findings from this study align with Bean's nine themes, specifically his theme of finance (2005). Bean (2005) noted that finances have a crucial role in student's intentions and decision to depart and explained that most students must pay substantial amounts of money for their education. Students often are required to take out loans to cover the cost of attending college. The data did demonstrate that finances are a crucial and serve as the primary variable driving students' intentionality, particularly with the resident students, who did not want to place a substantial financial burden on themselves and their families.

The findings only slightly stray from Bean's theme. Bean noted that it is difficult to fully isolate the effect of money on student departure. Furthermore, he argued that students from

upper- and middle-class families have social capital that positively affects student retention and cannot be measured. The findings in this study do not fit with this notion, as some students from the continental United States came from high socioeconomic backgrounds but saw the overall cost of attending UH Mānoa as a reason to leave. Students specifically cited not wanting to spend their allotted money when they could obtain a degree from a comparable college closer to home for a quarter of the cost. The data collected contradicted the notion of finances as an inseparable variable.

Tinto's theory on student departure has been cited more than any other study with regard to the subject matter. Tinto (1975, 1993) highlighted students' socioeconomic background as a key variable that influences student departure. However, this variable is grouped within students' overall pre-college demographics, such as parental education attainment, pre-college schooling, goal commitment, and individual attributes. Although Tinto acknowledged that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to persist at greater rates, he explained that "family income alone is becoming less of a determinant of college persistence" (1993, p. 99). It is important to note that these findings were first published in 1975 and then reintroduced in both the 1980s and early 2000s. The cost of higher education has risen at nearly four times the rate of the consumer price index since 1975. Therefore, Tinto's original assertion that family income was becoming less determinant was likely accurate at the time of publication. However, the economic recession of 2008 along with continuous spending cuts in public higher education over the past 20 years have led to dramatic increases in tuition for students. The central finding from this study demonstrates that the cost of higher education and financial resources available to the student via family and other means have a significant impact on student intentionality and departure. Despite an original intention to leave, the resident population ultimately decided to

stay because of integration into the campus community and their financial situation. Nonresidents ended up leaving because of their finances, despite having integrated into the campus community.

Astin's (1999) theory is based on the premise that the more students get involved on campus, the more likely they are to persist. His theory held true in this study for resident students, who cited an initial intention to leave after the first couple of years but ended up staying at UH Mānoa. In general, resident students seemed to be happy about their change of heart and decision to stay. They cited connections with faculty, a club or Registered Independent Organization, on-campus employment, and peer group support as influencing their decision to stay at the University. Thus, the findings from the study regarding the resident student population are very much in alignment with Astin's (1999) theory on student involvement.

The findings seem to deviate from Astin's (1999) and Tinto's (1993) theories with regard to the nonresident population. Nonresident students cited having a positive overall experience and getting connected on campus, but they ultimately needed to leave due to finances. The findings from the study do not disprove Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2012) and Astin's (1999) theories; rather, they offer an explanation for a shift in students' needs and priorities.

Implications for Practice

Unfortunately, the rising cost of higher education does not have a solution in sight. As state and federal support continue to decrease, colleges and their respective boards of regents have no choice but to raise the cost of attendance. State governments and students push back by requesting that institutions trim spending.

In 2013, Inside Higher Education and Gallup conducted a national survey of college and university business officers in order to gain an understanding of how the chief financial officers (CFOs) from institutions of higher education perceive the economic stability of their respective colleges' financial futures. Gallup developed the survey instrument. The researchers sent over 2,531 email invitations to potential participants. Out of these invitations, 451 CFOs completed the web survey (Jaschik & Lederman, 2013). Responses by institutional setting included 223 from public institutions, 222 from private institutions, and 12 from for-profit private institutions (Jaschik & Lederman, 2013, p. 9). The sampling error was +/- 4.2 percentage points. The researchers found that for the public institutions, "Only one in four CFOs strongly agree they are confident about the sustainability of their institution's financial model over the next five years; less than 13% strongly agree their model is sustainable over 10 years" (Jaschik & Lederman, 2013, p. 10). Furthermore, few CFOs perceived that faculty are realistic about their institutions' financial challenges. When asked about cost cutting, four strategies appeared to have the most support from the participants. Over 41% of CFOs stated that their respective institutions are "moving from a classroom based to a Web-based model of instruction" (Jaschik & Lederman, 2013, p. 10). Approximately two-thirds of respondents indicated that they are collaborating with academic programs from other institutions, 39% indicated that their institutions are eliminating underperforming academic programs, and 36% indicated that they are going to reduce administrative positions (Jaschik & Lederman, 2013, p. 10). Institutions have continued to cut tenure positions dramatically: in 1975 only 30% of faculty were non-tenure track, compared to the present day in which nearly 70% of faculty teaching courses are non-tenure track (Edmonds, 2015).

Institutions of higher education, like any other private, public, or nonprofit organizations, have operating costs. Teachers, administrators, student affairs professionals, and custodians are all required by institutions to keep their doors open. Electricity and water alone often can make up millions of dollars of the operating budget. The field of higher education is caught between a rock and hard place, to put it plainly. On one side, state governments are continuing to decrease the amount of appropriated funds. On the other side, students are demanding tuition freezes and cannot bear the financial burden of the rising cost. Private gifts and highly competitive research grants are not a viable option for long-term financial stability. Given that states continue to cut spending on higher education, intuitions are forced to raise tuition for covering operating costs. One example is the University of California, where the board of regents authorized an increase in tuition and fees as of January 26, 2017 (Watanabe, 2017).

A short-term solution to the problem is to offer scholarships to students as financial incentives for them to stay. Many out-of-state research participants said a scholarship would help positively influence their decision to remain at UH Mānoa. Scholarships would help offset the cost. Zumeta (2012) noted that financial scholarships and grants could serve as an effective retention tool for higher education administrators. Although scholarships for students who intend to leave are a short-term solution, they do not address the long-term economic challenges facing institutions of higher education.

Most recently, UH Mānoa has begun offering first year students identified as having a high probability of leaving, a $5,000 scholarship, as incentive to return for their second year. The logic behind the decision is that it is cheaper to offer these potential leavers a significant discount then to lose them as students entirely. Students are identified as recipients for the scholarship using a logistic regression model, with the primary variables being related to costs of attending

college. This short-term initiative serves the potential to stop the loss of students and increase tuition revenue for the university. Findings for this pilot scholarship program will be made available in December 2017 to determine if it was successful at increasing the institutional retention rate.

Implications for Future Research

The findings from the study are bound to the research site, UH Mānoa. As noted above, Hawai‘i, specifically Honolulu, has been cited as one of the most expensive places to live in the world (Forbes, 2016). Although tuition and fees have been on a continuous rise across the nation, cost of living, which affects the cost for students to attend college, is significantly less in nearly every other city across the continental United States. The next logical step for further research would be to replicate the study across a diverse sample of public four-year colleges in the continental United States, to determine if economics is in fact driving students' intention and decision to depart from such colleges across the nation.

Institutions of higher education have turned to offering many introductory courses online to serve a greater number of students and lower the cost of instruction. Although this has much appeal from an administrative and theoretical perspective, it is not effective in practice. Fortunately, there is readily available research on e-learning and student retention despite the field being new. On average, online courses have a 20% higher failure rate than traditional classroom environments (Bawa, 2016). Approximately 40% to 80% of online students dropout of online classes (Bawa, 2016). Clearly, moving from in-class to online instruction as a means of cost saving for the institution and student negatively impacts student retention. Although e-learning has great economic appeal for institutions, it has severe limitations for student success.

The development of virtual reality in the private sector holds promise for utilization in higher education. Challenges with e-learning can include, for example, the loss of personal connections associated with in-class instruction (Bawa, 2016). Furthermore, e-learning heavily relies on pre-recorded lectures, which do not allow for scaffolding between the student and instructor. Virtual reality may serve as a cost-effective hybrid that allows students to take advantage of the benefits of e-learning while simulating the in-class experience.

Clearly, finances served as a primary driver for student's intentions and subsequent decision to stay or depart. As indicated in the findings, students stated that a scholarship or some type of institutional aid would serve as an effective retention tool. However, no exact dollar amount was specified as a threshold by which would influence their decision to stay. Future research should examine what exact dollar amount would alter a student's decision to depart. Given the unique economic situation for each student, a regression analysis examining the family contribution and already existing aid would need to incorporate quantitative variables to determine the unique financial aid threshold for each student.

Future research should explore long-term, economically stable models of higher education and advanced learning. Current research demonstrates that higher education is on dangerous economic trend in which the cost of higher education is rising, yet the earnings of college graduates have flat lined and recently started to decline (College Board, 2015). It is not a matter of if higher education will stop being financially plausible for students from low to middle socioeconomic backgrounds, but when. Future research should explore ways of creating a more sustainable model of higher education. The only current alternative model is through e-learning,

which has serious limitations for student success. Research should focus on finding alternative models that do not require thousands, and sometimes hundreds of thousands, of dollars in debt for students.

Conclusion

In this study, I have sought to understand why first-time degree-seeking students at a large public research university indicate prior to starting classes that they plan to transfer, stop out, or dropout of the university. A synthesis of the literature on student departure has demonstrated that there was gap in the current knowledge base. This study utilized a collective case study research methodology to answer the driving question. The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa was used as the primary research site. I selected 10 resident students and 11 nonresident students who indicated that they planned to transfer or otherwise leave the university as part of their educational objectives to participate in the study. Individual interviews served as the primary means of data collection. The findings yielded rich data that provided answers to the research question after being coded and analyzed. The central takeaway from the study is that students' financial situation is the primary force driving their intention and subsequent decision to stay or depart. Even students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds did not see it as financially practical to persist when they could attend a comparable institution near home for a fraction of the cost. Although past studies have cited finances as one of many variables that influence student departure, to my knowledge, this is the first empirical study that identifies finances as the driving force behind students' intention and decision to depart. The current economic trajectory of higher education coupled with the findings from this study raise serious concerns about the long-term viability of college education as a means for individuals to advance themselves.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Objective: Through the use of a collective case study, the objective is to learn why first year students at a large public research institution attend higher education without the intention of completing a degree. It is my hope that the findings from the study help guide administrators in policy formulation and relevant first year student retention programming.

Dissertation Research Question:

Why do first-time degree seeking students at a large public research university indicate they plan to leave (stop-out or dropout) prior to the start of classes?

Interview Protocol: Prior to meeting, I will send out an email to the participants asking them to bring three artifacts to the meeting which represent the "college experience" to them. When first meeting with the students, I will ask them to share their artifacts with me. Following the artifact sharing, I will ask participants the following semi-structured questions:

Interview Questions:

1. Why did you decide to attend college at UH Mānoa?
    a. What influenced your decision to attend UH Mānoa?
2. Please explain the role finances play in attending higher education?
    a. Please explain to what degree, if any, finances played in your decision to attend UH Mānoa.
3. What are your long term educational and career goals?
    a. Please discuss your confidence in being able to achieve your stated goals.
    b. Please discuss a challenging situation you have overcome; how were you able to overcome the situation to achieve your goal.
4. Please define for me the "college experience"

    a. Is this definition consistent with your: I. Peers II. Parents/Caregivers?

5. What forms of social support do you have readily available upon starting classes at UH Mānoa?
6. Do you anticipate you will complete a baccalaureate degree from UH Mānoa?
    a. If not, why?

Appendix B: Interview Crosswalk

Interview Crosswalk										
	Constructivist Worldview- how individuals perceive the world and give meaning to experiences	Bean's (2005) Nine Themes of College Student Retention								
Semi Structured Interview Questions		Intentions	Institutional Fit	Psychological Process	Academics	Social Factors	Bureaucratic Factors	Finances	External Environment	Student's Background
Why did you decide to attend college at UH Mānoa	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
a. What influenced your decision to attend UH Mānoa	x	**x**	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Please explain the role finances play in attending higher education?	x	x	x					x		x
a. Please explain to what degree, if any, finances played in your decision to attend UH Mānoa	x	x	x					x		x
What are your long term educational and career goals?	x	x	x		x			x		
a. Please discuss your confidence in being able to achieve your stated goals.	x			x						
b. Please discuss a challenging situation you have overcome; how were you able to overcome the situation to achieve your goal.	x			x					x	
Please define for me the "college experience"	x	x	x		x	x	x			
a. Is this definition consistent with your: I. Peers II. Parents/Caregivers	x		x		x	x		x		x
What forms of social support do you have readily	x		x	x	x	x	x			

available upon starting classes at UH Mānoa?										
Do you anticipate you will complete a baccalaureate degree from UH Mānoa?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
a. If not, why?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	

Appendix C: Human Studies Program Exempt Status

Office of Research Compliance
Human Studies Program

UNIVERSITY of HAWAI'I® MĀNOA

October 29, 2015

TO: Kyle Van Duser
Chris Lucas
Principal Investigator
Office of Undergraduate Education

FROM: Denise A. Lin-DeShetler, MPH, MA
Director

SUBJECT: CHS #23482- "A Paradigm Shift: Revisiting the Issue of First Year Student Retention"

This letter is your record of the Human Studies Program approval of this study as exempt.

On October 29, 2015, the University of Hawai'i (UH) Human Studies Program approved this study as exempt from federal regulations pertaining to the protection of human research participants. The authority for the exemption applicable to your study is documented in the Code of Federal Regulations at 45CFR 46.101(b)(Exempt Category 2,4).

Exempt studies are subject to the ethical principles articulated in The Belmont Report, found at http://www.hawaii.edu/irb/html/manual/appendices/A/belmont.html.

Exempt studies do not require regular continuing review by the Human Studies Program. However, if you propose to modify your study, you must receive approval from the Human Studies Program prior to implementing any changes. You can submit your proposed changes via email at uhirb@hawaii.edu. (The subject line should read: Exempt Study Modification,) The Human Studies Program may review the exempt status at that time and request an application for approval as non-exempt research.

In order to protect the confidentiality of research participants, we encourage you to destroy private information which can be linked to the identities of individuals as soon as it is reasonable to do so. Signed consent forms, as applicable to your study, should be maintained for at least the duration of your project.

This approval does not expire. However, please notify the Human Studies Program when your study is complete. Upon notification, we will close our files pertaining to your study.

If you have any questions relating to the protection of human research participants, please contact the Human Studies Program at 956-5007 or uhirb@hawaii.edu. We wish you success in carrying out your research project.

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An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution

Appendix D: Informed Consent

University of Hawai'i
Consent to Participate in Research Project:
Assessment of Access To College Excellence Learning Communities Program

My name is Kyle Van Duser. I am a faculty member at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa in the department of Undergraduate Education. I am doing a research project which seeks to examine why students attend a large public research university without the intention of completing a degree. I am asking you to participate because you indicated either an uncertainty about your educational goals at UHM or a desire to transfer prior to graduating.

Activities and Time Commitment: If you participate in this project, I will meet with you for an interview at a location and time convenient for you. The interview will consist of 10-15 open ended questions. It will take 45 minutes to an hour. Interview questions will include questions like, “Why did you decide to attend college at UH Mānoa?” “Please explain the role finances play in attending higher education?” “What are your long term educational and career goals?” Only you and I will be present during the interview. I will audio-record the interview so that I can later transcribe the interview and analyze the responses. You will be one of about 20 people whom I will interview for this study.

Benefits and Risks: There will be no direct benefit to you for participating in this interview. The results of this project may help improve the Access to College Excellence (ACE) Learning Communities program to benefit future students. I believe there is little risk to you in participating in this research project. You may become stressed or uncomfortable answering any of the interview questions or discussing topics with me during the interview. If you do become stressed or uncomfortable, you can skip the question or take a break. You can also stop the interview or you can withdraw from the project altogether.

Privacy and Confidentiality: I will keep all information in a safe place. Only I will have access to the information. Other agencies that have legal permission have the right to review research records. The University of Hawai‘i Human Studies Program has the right to review research records for this study. After I write a copy of the interviews, I will erase or destroy the audio-recordings. When I report the results of my research project, I will not use your name. I will not use any other personal identifying information that can identify you. I will use pseudonyms (fake names) and report my findings in a way that protects your privacy and confidentiality to the extent allowed by law.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You may stop participating at any time. If you stop being in the study, there will be no penalty or loss to you. Your choice to participate or not participate will not affect your rights to services at with the ACE Learning Communities Program.

You will receive a $5 gift certificate to either Starbucks or Jamba Juice for your time and effort

in participating in this research project.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please call or email me at (808) 956-8626 duser@hawaii.edu If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the UH Human Studies Program at 808.956.5007 or uhirb@hawaii.edu.

If you agree to participate in this project, please sign and date this signature page and return it to:

Please keep the section above for your records.
If you consent to be in this project, please sign the signature section below and return it to ***.

Tear or cut here

Signature(s) for Consent:

I give permission to join the research project entitled, *Assessment of Access to College Excellence Learning Communities Program.*

Please initial next to either "Yes" or "No" to the following:

_____ Yes _____ No I consent to be audio-recorded for the interview portion of this research.

Name of Participant (Print): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Signature of the Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____

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